An investigation into the motives of filicidal mothers in selected plays

by

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Abstract

Maternal filicide is a rare crime perpetrated for a number of reasons. It is a complex multifactorial phenomenon with psychiatric, psychological and environmental factors combining to create fertile ground for this crime. This study investigates the extent to which dramatic texts adhere to research on maternal filicide. This would determine the degree to which an actor charged with playing a filicidal mother would be able to create a psychologically coherent and believable character. Four plays were selected for this research study which have maternal filicide as motif, namely: *Aalst* (McLean, 2007), My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies (Meiring, 2011), *And all the children cried* (Jones & Campbell, 2002) and *By the Bog of Cats* (Carr, 1999).

A discussion on acting approaches and text analysis was done to indicate how an actor would analyse a dramatic text so as to create a character for performance adhering to psychological realism. It was determined that, for the purposes of this thesis, most information pertaining to character will be found in the background story, given circumstances and character components of formalist text analysis.

The three most dominant perspectives on maternal filicide were briefly discussed in an attempt to understand what type of mother would kill her child. Literature from the psychiatric perspective documented unipolar depression, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia as three conditions often associated with filicidal mothers. From the psychological literature, it emerged that certain personality disorders are often diagnosed in mothers who have killed their children. The psychosocial perspective argues that a mother becomes filicidal because of environmental factors which impact negatively on her psychologically and thus impair her functioning. Child development theories, the neurological and the feminist perspective were also considered.

The factors associated with maternal filicide were then delineated as cognitive, affective and behavioural manifestations so as to make them recognisable when encountered in the backstory, given circumstances and character components of a text.

It was concluded that all four plays were factually accurate in creating a psychosocial environment in which maternal filicide is possible. It was, however, found that only three of the four texts adhered to research on maternal filicide in that the filicidal characters exhibited behaviour, cognitions and affect in accordance with mental illnesses associated with this crime.

Opsomming

Moedermoord is 'n seldsame misdaad wat gepleeg word om 'n verskeidenheid redes. Dit is 'n komplekse, multifaktoriale fenomeen met psigiatriese, sielkundige en omgewingsfaktore wat saamwerk om vrugbare teelaarde te skep vir hierdie misdaad. Hierdie studie ondersoek die mate waarin dramatekste voldoen aan navorsing oor moedermoord. Dit bepaal die mate waarin 'n akteur wat die rol van 'n moedermoordenaar moet vertolk, 'n sielkundig samehangende karakter sal kan skep. Vier toneelstukke is gekies vir hierdie navorsingstudie wat moedermoord as motief het, naamlik *Aalst* (McLean, 2007), My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies (Meiring, 2011), *And all the children cried* (Jones & Campbell, 2002) en *By the Bog of Cats* (Carr, 1999).

'n Bespreking oor toneelspelbenaderings en teksanalise is gedoen om aan te dui hoe 'n akteur 'n dramatiese teks sou ontleed ten einde 'n karakter te skep wat voldoen aan sielkundige realisme. Daar is vasgestel dat, vir die doeleindes van hierdie tesis, die meeste inligting wat verband hou met karakter in die agtergrondstorie, gegewe omstandighede en karakter komponente van formalistiese teksanalise voorkom.

Die drie mees dominante perspektiewe oor moedermoord is kortliks bespreek in 'n poging om te verstaan watter tipe ma haar kind sou doodmaak. Literatuur van die psigiatriese perspektief dokumenteer unipolêre depressie, bipolêre versteuring en skisofrenie as drie kondisies wat dikwels geassosieer word met moedermoord. Uit die sielkundige literatuur het dit geblyk dat sekere persoonlikheidsversteurings dikwels gediagnoseer word in moeders wat hul kinders doodmaak. Die psigososiale perspektief hou voor dat 'n ma moontlik moorddadig word as gevolg van omgewingsfaktore wat sielkundig negatief impakteer en dus haar funksionering benadeel. Kinderontwikkelingsteorieë, die neurologiese en die feministiese perspektiewe is ook oorweeg.

Die bewese faktore wat verband hou met moedermoord is afgebaken as kognitiewe, affektiewe en gedragmanifestasies om dit herkenbaar te maak wanneer teëgekom in die agtergrondstorie, gegewe omstandighede en karakter komponente van 'n teks.

Daar is bevind dat al vier toneelstukke feitelik korrek was in die skep van 'n sosiologiese omgewing waarin moedermoord moontlik is. Slegs drie van die vier tekste voldoen egter aan navorsing oor moedermoord tot die mate waarin die moordende karakters se gedrag, kognisies en affek toon in ooreenstemming is met geestelike siektes wat verband hou met hierdie misdaad.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background study and rationale

1.1.1 Personal perspective

Veronique Olmi wrote a novella called *Bord De Mer* (2001) which was translated into English by Adriana Hunter as *Beside the Sea* (2010). In this novella a single mother takes her two boys on a last vacation beside the sea where she then suffocates first the one and then the other boy. Lisa Dwan, a British actor critically acclaimed for her performances in some of Samuel Beckett's short plays, decided to make a one-man show of *Beside the Sea*. She had to travel to Paris where Olmi resides to audition for the author who then granted Dwan the rights for an adaptation of the novella for theatre. Olmi had one piece of advice for the actor: "Don't cry during the monologue. If somebody must cry, it's the audience, not you. This woman has no self-awareness, she does not try to understand or analyse herself. She is much further in than that. She's within the tragedy" (Bidisha, 2012).

I try, but I can't. Not cry, I mean. I will start this study from a personal perspective and then I will vacate the stage and continue on a more academic route. I am an actor. I am a teacher of acting. I am a student of psychology. I am also a mother of twin boys. The idea of this research first presented itself three years ago when I was offered the role of the mother in a stage production of *Aalst* written by Pol Heyvaert and Dimitri Verhulst (2005). This told the (true) story of a mother and father who killed their two children over a period of some days whilst staying in a hotel room in the small city of Aalst in Belgium. All actors relish the idea of a “juicy” role and I accepted. Then the idea formed that the production could serve as the practical component of a Master's degree in Drama and Theatre Studies, a much dreaded endeavour that has been looming at the back of my teacher's mind for some time. The idea was to do a literary review of maternal filicide in theatre and generate knowledge through praxis. I started doing exploratory research and found myself in tears after every foray into this dark side of motherhood. At this time my boys were one year old and I was struggling with tremendous anxiety which manifested in simmering anger which occasionally turned into explosive anger, excessive attempts to control my environment and excessive eating (I have a history of eating disorders). Despite seeing a therapist at the time and being assured that I am not depressed, things quickly escalated to the point where I would have to pull over to the side of the road in fear of causing an accident because I couldn't see through my tears if I heard a story, any story, about children dying or suffering on a news bulletin. I came to the realisation that I was primed for any tragedy relating to children and that my resilience was too low to expose myself to stories about maternal filicide. The research was put on hold.

It is now three years later and, retrospectively, I must agree with Smith (a respected medical practitioner) when he says that "every parent is a potential baby-basher" (in Corti, 1998: 5). I experienced this potential. This reflexive introduction is more than an anecdotal account of my journey; it serves to illustrate that I am an actor who agrees with Alexander Ferguson (2009: 10) when he writes that "any performance in which a performer stands in for someone else (for example, an actor representing a character) plays on the tension between the actual and the fictive, between that which is materially present and that which is absent and referenced". Ferguson (2009: 10) cites Erika Fischer-Lichte as saying that during a performance, the spectator's attention swings between the "performer body" (the actual) and the character represented (the fictive):

> She calls this an oscillation. But whichever end of the binary is highlighted, the other end remains in play to a lesser or greater degree; even when focusing on character the spectator never completely loses sight of the performer body, and vice versa.

Stanislavsky's early work also demanded that the actors use their own life experience to create believability in characterization (Kemp, 2010: 18). The fact that Stanislavsky believes in the subjective experience of the actor – rather than merely using the actor as a functionality within some larger aesthetic framework – is due in large part to his own experiences as a theatre practitioner. As Larlham (2012: 141) puts it:

> Stanislavsky did not write about acting from a philosophical remove. Stanislavsky was an actor before he was a director, teacher, or theorist of acting, and, when he writes, he writes as an actor, from the perspective of the actor's "I".

My experience as a mother would therefore be integral to understanding the challenges posed to me as an actor when portraying a filicidal mother. It also serves as a frightening case in point of what, in 1967, psychiatrist Joseph Rheingold called the "virtually universal existence in women of a maternal filicidal impulse" (in Corti, 1998: 10). Corti (1998: 179) describes the difference between the parent who kill and those who don't, as a failure to control feelings or impulses, rather than the nature of these feelings or impulses.

As an actor who has predominantly worked in the Afrikaans theatre arena for the past twenty years, I have often had to play characters that were too hastily written. There has existed and still exists, a big emphasis on the creation of new plays in Afrikaans. This leads to, amongst many other things, plays seldom having time to incubate either as a text or as a production. A production often starts with a "text in progress" and, after only three weeks of rehearsals, ends as a "play in progress". As an actor I have had to contend with factual incongruities concerning a character that can often find it's

aetiology in lack of research by the writer because of a lack of time. Deficient research also hampers actors when they have limited time to prepare for a role.

All actors know the story of Medea. I have read it and I have analysed it as a dramatic text. I have never had the opportunity to play her though, but have often thought, as a mother, that I find it hard to believe that any mother will kill her two children purely out of revenge. The research done for this study clearly shows that my thinking was ignorant. It is with trepidation that I reflect on the two filicidal mothers I have had to portray in the span of my acting career.

The first was in the unpublished play Klaasvakie by Lourens de Vos (originally written in Flemish in 2010 as De Zandman and translated into Afrikaans by Marthinus Basson who also directed the play). I performed the role of the nameless nurse who assimilated the dark side of the two main characters who shared a room in an old-age home as well as a history. The story that was told was that of a teenaged girl who was seduced by the father of the other character, a prominent political figure. The girl fell pregnant and gave birth to a boy. The father, not wanting to lose face in the eyes of society, covered up the story in a web of lies. With no emotional or financial support, the girl eventually suffocated her son, then aged four. My nameless character had as her function to embody the lies these characters have lived including the girl's denial of her filicidal act. This entailed the dramatic playing out of the filicidal act at the end of the play. I was five months pregnant with my twins at the time and felt I had already given up ownership of my body; that I was merely a vessel carrying these two parasitic beings inside of me. The shift to also allow this filicidal girl to enter me, was therefore quite natural and I achieved great success with this character without really knowing anything about maternal filicide per se.

Sometime after my twins were born, I played the part of a divorced mother of an autistic boy in a short film entitled *Die Bach Motief*, written and directed by De Wet Van Rooyen in 2013. In this film the mother is told by doctors that her boy has limited time to live due to complications arising from his severe autism. She then decides to euthanize her son after which she commits suicide. As I mentioned earlier, I was an overly anxious mother with little resilience and the thought of killing my own son was enough to have me in tears throughout the filming of this short movie. Again, I did no research on maternal filicide. If I had, I might have had more insight into the tragedy and realised, as Veronique Olmi says, that the character was too far inside the tragedy to necessarily warrant tears.

When I was then offered the part of the filicidal mother in a production of Pol Hayvart's *Aalst* (2005) I read the play and was perplexed. I found the characters very flippant and nearly two-dimensional. The interesting thing about *Aalst*, though, is that it is tribunal theatre. The play is about an actual

event that took place in Aalst in Belgium and used, as the basis of the text, the actual court transcripts of the couple's trial. Which meant that my reading of the play was flawed. This led me to the realisation that I needed to research the field of maternal filicide if I were to understand the play and the character. In the course of this research I came upon many dramatic texts with maternal filicide as theme and this led me to wonder if, with my new-found knowledge on the subject, I will find the requisite psychological and environmental factors empirically proven to be linked to maternal filicide, present in these texts.

1.1.2 Filicide in literature

In a cursory review of maternal filicide in literature, I found three distinct explanations as to why this theme occurs in literature. The first posits that fictional murderous mothers function as societal scapegoats in that they represent everything that is “other” and thus unwished for in a moral society. The tenet here is that society is inherently moral. Most modern literature with maternal filicide as theme however do not ascribe to this notion. The second comes from the research done in the field of generational hostility and argues that people have an innate hostility towards children. The fictional filicidal mother becomes the societal scapegoat to draw the attention away from the large-scale abuse of children that modern society unconsciously condones. The third field employs the theme of maternal filicide as a way to make society aware of its role in human tragedy. It does not argue that society is immoral per se, merely that even good people can be contributing to individual tragedy by being ignorant. Fact-based theatre specifically aims to give voice to the marginalised in an effort to hold society accountable in order to achieve change. The following sub-sections will briefly look at these three broad explanations for maternal filicide in literature.

1.1.2.1 Bad mothers in a good world

In this thesis I will be analysing four texts written for stage. Whether these dramas succeed in conveying a broader political message, serve as fantasy fulfilment for the audience, or merely “feed the same voyeuristic impulses on which some sections of the press rely” (Inchley, 2013: 194) is beyond the scope of this research. This thesis will not attempt a literary or critical analysis of the four dramatic texts. Literature, and theatre specifically, has always taken the responsibility of giving voice to the voiceless: “In theatre, there is a long tradition of plays that has allowed female killers of children, some mythological, some based on real women, to speak” (Inchley, 2013: 194).

Whereas anthropologists found that poverty (whether of the individual or of the community) played a large role in whether or not children were allowed to live, in literature, emotions dominate the motives for filicide – anger, jealousy, shame, revenge – and these usually reflect the time and culture

in which they were written. According to Schwartz and Isser (2007: 1) literature is the "vehicle by which the artist explains gender, power, and moral relationships between individuals and society". Maternal filicide was deemed an act against nature and just like witchcraft, heresy, parricide, sodomy, and murder, it challenged the prevailing order and stability of society as well as the sacredness of the family. "At all times and in all places, child homicide was also a constant reminder of the fragility of the prevailing moral order" (Schwartz and Isser, 2007: 2). Where the motive for killing children might be different in historical documents compared to literature, the documented typical attributes of a child-murdering mother remains the same; pride, jealousy, mental instability and anger (Corti, 1998: 14).

In concurrence with most research on maternal filicide, it must be noted that modern plays subscribe to the notion that maternal filicide is a multi-factorial phenomenon with the burden of responsibility not merely on the shoulders of the murdering mother but on society as a whole. This was not always the case. Historically, literature that depicted maternal filicide was morality fables warning of the sins known to endanger the eternal souls of people (Hill, 2009: 164).

In a fascinating dissertation on the presentation of maternal filicide in early modern English literature, Hill (2009: 112) writes that all murdered children are "pretty, innocent, sweet babies" and that the mothers who kill them were presented as wild vicious animals, often likened to tigers. As a familiar symbol of evil and sin in English literature, the tiger or tigress was a particularly useful image of fierce rapacity. Medieval bestiaries employed images and stories of animals for moral instruction, and the tiger was often associated with ferocity as well as the sins of pride and vanity (Hill, 2009: 117). These female killers are seen as both wild animals and unnatural women (Hill, 2009: 119). In popular literature, tiger-hearted women kill the weak and vulnerable, while their virtuous counterparts – mothers, daughters, and wives – love and nurture. These murderesses do not just violate the laws of state, they violate the laws of nature and God (Hill, 2009: 121).

Hill (2009: 121) also notes that, in contradiction to most research done on the social environment of filicidal mothers, the fictitious murderers are never poor and desperate in these narratives and their husbands are respectable, capable, and honest men. As Schwartz and Isser (2007: 16) point out, the lesson was clear:

> Women were carefully monitored and their conduct scrutinized. Any deviation from established codes would not be tolerated, and any disgrace would also involve her family. The woman's role was clearly defined: to be subordinate as wife and mother to the will of man, but clearly not to be defiled outside marriage.

Only at the end of the 19th century does the narrative about motherhood start to change in literature. Feminists used drama to express their revulsion at their pre-ordained subordinate roles in family and society. *Alan's Wife*, written by Florence Bell and Elizabeth Robins at the turn of the century (1901), was an objection against society's assumptions about mothers. The heroine, Jean Creyke, kills her handicapped son. She does this because her husband is dead, and she fears that if and when she is unable to care for the child, he will be left vulnerable and destitute. She characterizes her deed as one of love and at the end of the play fearlessly accepts her death sentence. Schwartz and Isser (2007: 16) posit that even this gesture is part of the feminist dialogue, "for Jean can escape the death penalty for infanticide if she claims she was insane when she acted. The play is essentially an indictment of an uncaring society in which Jean takes complete control and responsibility".

Inchley (2013: 194) argues that, outside the clinical realm, the theatre might be the only place where the "voice of the transgressive and violent female delinquent" could be heard without the media or legal processes distorting it. Although Hill's dissertation deals with maternal filicide in early modern English literature and Inchley's article refers to modern plays, the two women document the same phenomenon. Inchley (2013: 204) argues that literary representations of women who kill children tend to play on people's fear when they perceive their beliefs to be threatened. She also suggests that there is a correlation between the ways that fictional women are represented in literature with regard to their social positions, and with the ways that non-fictional women are treated by the law (Inchley, 2013: 205). In court, a defence of diminished responsibility is possible for women who plead guilty. This entails having to admit being a prisoner of emotions and hormones (Inchley, 2013: 196). Much like the fictional child murderers in Hill's study who – "if they repent, rediscover their faith in God, and meet death with a clear conscience, cheerful countenance, and a warning to others to avoid sin" – become ambassadors for their sex (Hill, 2009: 159).

Society's insistence that mothers who kill their children do so in complete defiance of all natural laws, is illustrated in an interesting study done by Silverman and Kennedy (1988). They found that:

> When women kill their spouses only 6% are declared as having mental illness. When they kill other acquaintances or family, 9% are supposedly mentally ill. But when they violate the maternal role and kill their children, women are declared mentally ill 67% of the time (36% for those committing infanticide). (Silverman and Kennedy, 1988: 123)

They cite Straus (1980) as saying that his research leads him to believe that only about 10% of interfamily violence can be accounted for by psychological factors. They argue that perhaps, when mothers kill their children this proportion rises, "but it is difficult to believe that it rises to the level

indicated by police reports. Instead, it is likely that the tautology 'if they killed their kids they must be crazy' is leading police to check off that category on their code sheets" (Silverman and Kennedy, 1988: 123). This study is an indication of society's need to pathologise maternal filicide as caused by some defect situated within the mother alone, thus letting the rest of us off the hook. This correlates with Hill's findings where fictional child murderers were made to understand that they alone are to blame for their heinous crimes.

1.1.2.2 The evil resides within us all

Lillian Corti has what could be considered a frightening view on filicide in theatre. In her book *The Myth of Medea and the Murder of Children* (1998) she argues that the act of child murder in dramatic texts implies an innate hostility toward children and that infanticide is a "worst-case scenario that functions as the dreadful fulfilment of a human potential implicit in the negative desire common to all mankind" (Corti, 1998: xvi). The tragedy of Medea, for example, is therefore disconcerting "because it articulates and portrays disquieting and subversive passions that tend to be denied in the official discourse of any society" (Corti, 1998: xvi). Corti (1998: xv) also refers to a study by Aptekar, *Anjea: Infanticide, abortion and contraception in savage society*, in which these behaviours are equated with a "negative desire" or "a desire to avoid children". According to this perspective, which stems from research in the field of generational hostility, the murderous rage of entire societies toward children needed to be externalised or projected onto a socially agreed upon menace. Society needs scapegoats. According to this perspective, child killers in literature get to do what we all want to do.

Corti further mentions a study done by Barbara Kellum on child-murder in England in the Middle Ages in which Kellum writes that the process of externalisation allows for fantasies to be projected onto designated "outsiders". Although Kellum's study dealt with non-fictional killings, the subsequent telling and writing of these stories caused them to become literary. She notes the "obvious, almost obsessional relish that characterizes the descriptions of what the witches allegedly did to children, either sacrificing them to the Devil, eating their flesh raw, or roasting them and sucking their blood" (Corti, 1998: 11). "Kellum concludes that there was a repulsive reciprocity between the concept of the parasitic child and the popular fantasies of witches who 'sucked babies' blood' and Jews who 'drained children's bodies dry'" (Corti, 1998:10). Looking at these writings it seems we not only want to kill our offspring, but will also enjoy every minute of it!

Corti (1998: 27) argues that the latent hostility of society towards children become especially apparent when one considers the fact that presentations of filicidal material can provide comic as well as tragic pleasure. She uses as example a comic scene from *Lysistrata* in which a young husband lures his wife

away from the other women in the hopes of having sex with her. He does so by playing on her fear for the life of her child: “There now, don't you feel pity for the child? / He's not been fed or washed now for six days” (Corti, 1998: 26). Not feeding a child for six days will lead to death. Yet the audience laughs. An example of filicide, not for comical purposes maybe but for popular mainstream television (of which the screen play would be literature), would be the father sacrificially burning his daughter at the stake in compliance to the red witch's wish in the popular HBO TV drama, *Game of Thrones*. Also evident in *Game of Thrones* was neonaticide based on gender. One character had his daughters abandon all boys born to them immediately after birth. The babies were put in the woods where they were taken by “the living dead” who then surely killed them in some horrible way only too vividly imagined by the viewer. According to the perspective posited by Corti and others, these depictions of filicide in popular entertainment could be seen as indicative of society’s innate, yet unacknowledged, wish to do away with children.

An argument could be made that sensational reporting in the media of actual maternal filicidal cases also feeds society’s need to vicariously “kill” through the scapegoat. Sensationalism in the media can of course also be a form of popular entertainment and as such, escapism. Gil (in Corti, 1998:15) argues that the sensationalising of maternal filicide could in fact be “diverting attention from the more damaging effects of institutionalized abuses such as poverty, discrimination and deprivation in the lives of millions of children”. These abuses occur as a result of societal denial but also because of political intent. Some argue that the act of war is another example of the intentional killing of children. Corti (1998: 203) cites Robinson Jeffers (1887-1962) who wrote in *Contemplation of the sword* (1938) that war is “the massacre, more or less intentional, of children and women”.

Miller (in Corti, 1998: x) states that the “victimisation of children is nowhere forbidden; what is forbidden is to write about it”. She is of course referring to the institutionalized victimisation of children which society does not want to acknowledge. Corti (1998: 213) notes that in the United States the general decline of confidence in public figures coincides with the appearance of dramatic treatments of the Medea motif in which broader issues are completely obscured by scenes of domestic violence. It seems then that people might thirst for fictional filicide at times when there is societal insecurity concerning leadership.

Corti (1998: 179) quotes from Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* (1887) on the irrational nature of punishment through the ages where “culprits were not punished because they were felt to be responsible for their crimes; they were punished out of rage at some damage suffered”. According to this perspective, parents punish their children not because of disciplinary reasons but because they exist and by existing, cause damage to the parent. The philosophical nature of this statement aside,

the practical repercussions can be considered to be just as frightening. An angry, seemingly violated parent can become a violent parent. As Silverman and Kennedy (1988: 124) point out, the family is the place in which violence is first learnt.

> In the case of children, violence directed against them (including "normal" physical punishment), as well as violence directed toward other members of the family, is likely to mould their orientation toward violence. Hence, the child from a violent home is more at risk to be violent in his own home upon reaching adulthood than are individuals without that exposure.

1.1.2.3 Don't look away: Fact-based theatre

A theatre form that takes giving a voice to the voiceless to the extreme, is documentary theatre. Documentary theatre has its roots in the 1960s and 1970s community theatre groups and "gave voice to the experiences of minority groups, using the techniques of devising drama out of testimony and the histories of 'ordinary' people that were developed by early twentieth-century Soviet agitprop theatre" (Taylor, 2011: 4). Using facts or verbatim testimony is a strong political tactic in a theatre of advocacy, and even though memories are unreliable (forensically), they carry the connotation of truth (Ferguson, 2009:8). Ferguson (2009: 9) argues that it is the intimacy of communication between an audience and the performer(s) which distinguishes documentary theatre from merely reading testimony or facts: "Without the intimacy that embodiment provides, and without the encounter, there is little need for documentary theatre, as other means of dissemination of a political message would suffice". Without a person embodying the facts, the document remains just that – a document. It remains textual:

> Data, textual narrative, policy, political agenda – these can be disseminated by other effective means such as the conference, the press release, and the protest march. In performance, documentary theatre goes from referencing the document to embodying it. (Ferguson, 2009:13)

Taylor (2011: 5) points out that the community theatres and Theatre in Education models of the 1970s and early 1980s had looked to Brechtian practices of distancing in order to propagate critical spectatorship which could lead to active change on the basis of understanding, but Brecht's ideas were discredited alongside Marxism in the wake of the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989. He describes the result of this discreditation as follows:

> The impact of this left a new generation of playwrights with the imperative to show the 'new

> times', and in particular the changed moralities and bleakness of the present, but without a defined theory of progressive agency to bring to bear. Once confidence in progressive politics was challenged by the apparent failure of the organized Left to define political alternatives to capitalism and the collapse of the Soviet Union, new forms of engaging the audience were sought, forms that did not depend predominantly on rational materialist argument. Playwrights looked to emotion as a way of forcing an audience to feel the anger and frustration of late twentieth century youth. (Taylor, 2011: 5)

In the 1990s theatre came to the realisation that emotional engagement as a critical strategy might yield more fruit (Taylor, 2011: 6). Taylor points out that fact-based theatre has taken three predominant forms in recent times. First, verbatim theatre uses the actual words of real people collected through, for instance, interviews or letters. Second, tribunal theatre, is based on court and public enquiry transcripts and also uses actual words, but they are collected from formal documents and court records. Third, documentary plays, "juxtapose key historical turning points or situations" (Taylor, 2011: 8). The 'raw' material is offered in order to engage audience sensibilities and for them to decide for themselves. Its purpose is to bring the audience 'on-side' rather than imposing an interpretation. Fact-based forms of theatre aim to "enlist" their audiences by getting them emotionally involved with the material presented (Taylor, 2011: 8).

Inchley (2013) has her reservations about the authenticity and consequent ethical issues of fact-based theatre. She questions the oft heard claim of theatre practitioners in this field that these forms offer a chance for the voices of otherwise silenced or marginalised groups or individuals to be heard: "It is presumed that the 'truth' and 'authenticity' of 'lost voices' are somehow carried in the reproduction of their exact words and sounds" (Inchley, 2013: 64). In this regard Inchley (2013: 65) cites verbatim theatre practitioner, Alecky Blythe, as quoted in *Verbatim, Verbatim* (2008), describing "the lengths she goes to in order to retain the exact speech rhythms of her subjects". Despite Blythe's acknowledgement of the compromise between entertainment and truth that occurs as an inevitable part of her job, Inchley argues that the acts of editing, structuring and splicing have led to scepticism regarding these forms of theatre's claims to truthfulness: "Theatre can be as guilty as any other medium in its choice of sensational subjects, and discomfort has been expressed with the intimacy that confessional genres seem to offer" (Inchley, 2013: 201). Rebellato (in Inchley, 2013: 201) also derided verbatim theatre's "deep voyeurism".

Although it is beyond the scope of this study to research the aetiology of the texts that will be discussed (and subsequent ethical questions that might arise from that research) it is interesting that three of the four texts (*Aalst*, *And all the children cried* and My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies) use

techniques associated with fact-based theatre.

1.2 Problem statement and research question

It seems clear that literature has as one of its functions, the responsibility of being the moral compass of the society within which it exists. Whereas the evil to be banished in earlier literature was the filicidal mother, depicted in metaphors of varying evil, modern literature asks that society be made a culpable party to the tragedy of mothers killing their children. In both the morality fables in Hill's (2009) dissertation and the modern dramas that Inchley (2013) critiqued, however, the political function of the literature seems to have been more important than the truthfulness of the filicidal character's psychological and social situation.

My research question is therefore whether the psychiatric, psychological and environmental factors which have been found by researchers to be present in cases of maternal filicide, are indeed present in dramatic texts written for performance on stage so as to enable an actor to create a psychologically believable character. A critique of the political message and the successful conveyance thereof or not, is beyond the scope of this thesis although it interests me greatly.

Inchley (2013: 194) states:

> Ethically speaking, acting involves the selection of strategies upon which will depend the acceptance or otherwise of the authenticity of what and who is represented. It is an act of impersonation that allows artists to occupy the void that is left by otherwise stigmatised voices.

As an actor I subscribe to the Stanislavskian idea, highly influential in contemporary acting practice, of the moral integrity of the inner self. This means that I aspire to make the emotional journey of the character I am portraying, truthful. I agree with Inchley when she argues that these processes are essentially interpretative though: "Placing emphasis on the performer's personal and individual imaginative response risks that a character's voice expresses not the 'truth' of a character's emotion and experience, but a performer's version of it (however incisive their powers of imagination and empathy)" (Inchley, 2013: 196). It is for this reason that I will search for empirically proven environmental, psychiatric and psychological markers in the four chosen dramatic texts to ascertain whether there are enough factual accuracy for an actor to at least aspire to psychological truth.

1.3 Research methodology

Maternal filicide is a very complex phenomenon with its aetiology researched in a vast number of

fields. An exhaustive literature review on this subject was beyond the scope of this particular study though, as it is not my aim to provide further insight into the crime but merely to recognise the concrete indicators as they present in dramatic texts on analysis. Principles from both the positivist (quantitative) and phenomenology (qualitative) research paradigms will be used. This will be elaborated upon in chapter four.

Although the performance aspect of the filicidal mother is beyond the scope of this study, it would benefit the reader to know what acting theory this actor/researcher would utilise in creating a psychologically embodied character. In service of this, a brief chapter on acting approaches – with emphasis on The System, as first posited by Konstantin Stanislavsky – as well as an overview of formalist text analysis, is included in this thesis. To this end a literature review was undertaken.

The aim of this study (as can be seen from the research question) is to explore whether the various empirically proven psychiatric, psychological and environmental factors that are present when a mother kills her child, are in fact present in dramatic texts – where it is expected of the actor portraying the filicidal mother, to create a character the audience finds believable. Factual incongruities, as mentioned in the introduction, can burst the illusion of reality that audiences are asked to believe in in most realism theatre. A literature review of maternal filicide was therefore undertaken to better understand what psychiatric, psychological and environmental factors have been found to be present in cases of maternal filicide. Some of these factors are concrete (for example substance abuse) but others are more discreet. Some personality disorders were found to be present in filicidal mothers in some of the empirical studies that were reviewed and these needed to be operationalized as behavioural manifestations for me to be able to discern their presence in the dramatic texts.

Four dramatic texts, written in accordance with theatrical realism, were lastly analysed from a performer's perspective. These texts are *Aalst* (McLean, 2007), My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies (Meiring, 2011 unpublished), *And all the children cried* (Jones & Campbell, 2002) and *By the Bog of Cats* (Carr, 1999). I used both inductive and deductive reasoning in analysing the texts. This interpretive reading of the texts was unavoidable in that “what we do see depends mainly on what we look for” as a frequently used quote by John Lubbock states (Quotinq, 2016). In analysing the texts, I could inadvertently have interpreted certain lines or words so as to fit the profile of a filicidal mother as already established through research.

1.4 Chapter layout

Chapter one gives a personal perspective of where I fit into this research as well as why that would be relevant. A brief literature review of literature with a filicidal motif was undertaken. Keywords

and phrases used during the searches included “filicide in literature”, “infanticide in literature”, “maternal filicide in theatre”, “mothers who kill in drama” and “murderous women in literature”. The literature review is followed by my problem statement and research questions. Chapter one ends with the research methodology and a chapter layout.

Chapter two briefly looks at the process of text analysis and acting theory with specific emphasis on Konstantin Stanislavsky's System. As main source, I used a teaching document on text analysis used as a reader at the University of Stellenbosch’s Drama Department in the second year acting module. Further sources include peer-reviewed books and papers on acting theory. Keywords and phrases used during the searches included “analysis of dramatic texts”, “acting theory”, “Konstantin Stanislavsky”, “the System”, “realism”, “psychological realism” and “theatrical realism”. I will also draw upon my own professional experience as both a teacher and an actor. This chapter details how an actor reads a dramatic text to gather the geographical, biographical, psychological and environmental information needed in the creation of a character.

Chapter three gives a brief historical overview of maternal filicide as well as some perspectives on the nature of violence. The three most dominant fields of research on maternal filicide – psychiatric, psychological and psychosocial – will briefly be reviewed to establish whether these fields have succeeded in establishing a discernible environmental and clinical profile for mothers who kill their children. Only peer-reviewed books and journal articles from the disciplines of criminology, psychiatry, psychology, and sociology were reviewed. Keywords and phrases used during the searches included “women who kill”, “perspectives on violent women”, “why mothers kill”, “murderous mothers”, “mothers who kill their children”, “maternal child homicide”, “infanticide”, “filicide”, and “fatal child abuse”.

In chapter four I explain which principles I will be adhering to from both the positivist and phenomenological research paradigms and the reasons for doing so. This chapter delineates specific environmental and clinical conditions and the behavioural manifestations of these. The same sources were used as for chapter three with additional keywords and phrases used during the searches being “positivist research”, “phenomenological research”, “operationalising”, qualitative research”, “discourse analysis” and “quantitative research”.

Chapter five to eight consist of the text analysis, with specific focus on the presence or absence of conducive conditions to maternal filicide, of four modern dramatic texts written in the style of theatrical realism. The dramas were chosen for their varying geographical locations and their subsequent variance in culture. *Aalst*, written by Pol Heyvaert and Dimitri Verhulst (2005) from

Belgium (translated into English by Duncan McLean in 2007) and My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies (unpublished, 2011) written by Liz Meiring from South Africa tell the true life stories of mothers who killed their children. *Aalst* partially consists of court transcripts of the couple's trial and as such could be viewed as tribunal theatre. My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies tells the story of a mother who killed her drug addicted son who had been abusing her for years. At her trial she pleaded guilty to the murder and was given a three year suspended sentence with compulsory community service. Journalist Beatrix Campbell and social worker Judith Jones's *And all the Children Cried* (2002) apparently also made use of real-life transcripts of interviews with mothers who had abused and killed their children (as noted by two separate reviews of performances), although the printed text and authors' note make no mention of this. In this British play the fictitious main protagonist, Gail, is a working class mother who is in prison for the death of her one child. She is joined on stage by an actor playing Myra Hindley who, at the time the play was written, was still in prison for her involvement in the torture and murder of other women's children in the Yorkshire Moors in the early 1960s, and about which she had for decades refused to speak. The Irish writer Marina Carr loosely based her *By the Bog of Cats* (1999) on the Medea myth and this is the fourth and last text analysed.

Chapter five to eight use as main source the mentioned dramatic texts and the analytical components as delineated in chapter two. Other sources used in these chapters are reviews of the texts as well as reviews of performances as found on the websites of production companies or newspapers. Academic articles were also consulted. Search words and phrases used were the names of the texts and the names of the writers.

Chapter nine provides a summary of my research, conclusions that I came to as a result of this research and possible future research that could be done as a result of this study.

Chapter 2: How an actor prepares for a role

The process of creating, becoming, representing or embodying a character takes many forms. The fact that I use four different verbs to describe this phenomenon is already an indication that theatre practitioners differ in their beliefs regarding the nature of characterisation and in their processes in achieving characterisation. This process is determined by a number of acting theories, or as some would call it, approaches or even ideologies. The latter word could be seen as an indication of the earnestness with which most theatre practitioners ply their art or craft. In my experience as an actor, Bella Merlin (2001: 229) is right when she writes that the director's work-method determines how those choices may be made: “Some directors encourage detailed detective work on the script through analysis of actions and objectives; others introduce a variety of improvisations or devised scenarios to access the text”. For an actor who would probably work with numerous directors in the course of his or her career, this would necessitate a pliable attitude regarding process.

The first section of this chapter will give a brief overview of the different approaches to theatre as practiced by Western theatre practitioners. The four texts that will be discussed in this thesis are all written in the Western realist tradition, also sometimes called psychological realism (Wimmer, 2003) and it is from this perspective that the process of text analysis will be discussed in the second section of this chapter.

The Western realist tradition demands that the performance be truthful and believable. The perceived truthfulness of a performance relies on the spectator recognising the behaviour and situations on stage as being consistent with the life he or she knows. Stinespring (1999: 47) defines truthful acting as “the character is the actor behaving truthfully in the character's imaginary circumstances resulting in the performance of the text in front of a live audience”. Zarrilli’s (2005: 9) concise definition of truthful acting in realism puts it succinctly: “the audience needs to be convinced that the character is behaving as some would in ‘ordinary life’ within the ‘given circumstances’ of the scene”.

Kemp (2010: 9) posits that within the acting profession, “there is considerable suspicion of written theory, probably because so much knowledge about acting is held and communicated in a sort of oral tradition”. Carnicke (in Rynell, 2008: 75) writes that “Stanislavsky should be read as the practitioner he was, instead of as the theoretician he repeatedly informed us that he was not”. Both these statements underline what most theatre practitioners know: acting is doing and the writing up and teaching of these different approaches serve as mere parameters defining the practitioner’s approach.

2.1 Acting approaches

In his book, *Acting (Re) Considered*, Zarrilli (2005: 3) states the following:

> Every time an actor performs, he or she implicitly enacts a "theory" of acting – a set of assumptions about the conventions and style which guide his or her performance, the structure of actions which he or she performs, the shape that those actions take (as a character, role, or sequence of actions as in some performance art), and the relationship to the audience. Informing these assumptions are culture-specific assumptions about the body-mind relationship, the nature of the "self," the emotions/feelings, and performance context.

Stinespring (1999:11) cites Oscar Brockett as writing that realism found its beginnings as a movement in France in the 1850's. The credo of this new movement was that art must truthfully depict the real, physical world, and, since only the present world can be observed precisely, "truth can be attained only through impersonal, objective observation and representation of the world around us" (Stinespring, 1999: 11). Given the general feelings of optimism as a result of the achievements of science during the nineteenth century, late nineteenth and early twentieth century theatre theorists toiled under the modernist misconception that there was an absolute, objective, "scientific" way of acting: "Delsarte, Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, and a host of their disciples each developed systems which used languages of acting based on the assumption of an objective science of the mind and/or body" (Zarrilli, 2005: 6). In reaction to this movement there were theatre practitioners who rebelled against rationalism and/or "the word." German Expressionists, Artaud and others used language and metaphors of acting which celebrated the subjectivity of the actor, thereby making the profoundly personal the fountain of "truth". In this regard Zarrilli (2005: 10) points out that "[o]bjectivism and subjectivism remain two sides of the same problematic, dualistic coin". As Benedetti (in Zarrilli, 2005: 12) reports, late in his life Stanislavsky sought, through the method of physical action, to overcome what divided "mind from body, knowledge from feeling, analysis from action". As co-founder of the Moscow Art Theatre with Nemirovich Danchenko in 1898, Stanislavsky changed the course of theatre and acting forever (Stinespring, 1999: 13).

Konstantin Stanislavsky developed a system of acting training over the course of his lifetime which is often referred to as The System and often used in pursuit of psychological realism (Stinespring, 1999: 14). Stanislavsky's system is based on the assumption that the inner workings of a character is revealed through physical manifestations (Stinespring, 1999: 14). Stanislavsky's student, Michael Chekhov, developed an approach to the creation of character based on an active use of the imagination, not as an image in the head, but as an act of engagement of the entire body and mind.

The actor explores the creation of a character by physicalizing a “psychological gesture” through which the essence of the character and the body of the actor meet. A psychological gesture is a physical movement that communicates the feelings of the character (Zarrilli, 2005: 13). Merlin (2001: 213) writes that this gesture can range from being pedestrian to being symbolic.

Another theatre practitioner who conceptualised his approach to acting based on Stanislavsky's methods, was Sanford Meisner. At the core of Meisner's work is his definition of acting as "living truthfully under imaginary circumstances" (Stinespring, 1999: 23). Meisner’s approach to acting asks of the actor to be truthful with absolute attention on what he is doing in a certain situation alongside others (as opposed to attention on himself) (Stinespring, 1999: 47).

At the Teatr Laboratorium in Opole, Poland (founded 1959), Jerzy Grotowski built on Stanislavsky’s later work by creating an intensive psychophysical system for the actor aimed at self-transcendence in which the actor strips away all that is superfluous to become an empty vessel. The aim is to achieve neutrality both of body and of mind:

> Inspired in part by his observations of the intensive training of actor-dancers in the *kathakali* dance drama of Kerala, India, Grotowski’s early theatre work developed an intensive psychophysical process of physical/vocal training aimed at the elimination of anything extraneous. (Zarrilli, 2005: 14)

There are also many alternative approaches to modern acting which calls for the abolishment of the realistic and psychologically “whole” character. A number of productions since the 1960s attempted to do away with “character”. The writing of Samuel Beckett necessitates an acting approach in which the search for character will be fruitless. For Beckett it is the form and content rather than the actor, which needs to be embodied. Practitioners of this non-realist genre seemingly do not recognise any of the features of complex characters as found in psychological realism (Zarrilli, 2005: 18).

Contemporary views on acting can be divided into three main streams with reference to the relationship between the actor’s emotions and the character’s emotions. The first approach is called method acting. Method acting is an acting approach developed by Lee Strasberg (1988) in a reinterpretation of Konstantin Stanislavsky’s work on acting and also seeks emotional truth on stage. This acting approach advocates that the actor should immerse himself in the emotions of the character he portrays in order to convey a convincing character. In describing his teaching philosophy, Strasberg wrote: "The two areas of discovery that were of primary importance in my work at the Actors Studio and in my private classes were improvisation and affective memory” (Wikipedia, 2016: “Lee Strasberg”). Affective memory refers to personal memories the actor might access to trigger

emotional truth on stage and was one of the tenets of Stanislavsky's early teachings.

The second main stream in acting approaches is the so-called detachment approach, which is based on the work of Meyerhold and Brecht (1967–1968). In a move away from Stanislavsky, this approach upholds that the actor should not experience the character's emotions himself. Meyerhold and Brecht was of the opinion that the emotionally detached actor was more capable of arousing intense emotional reactions in the audience (Zarrilli, 2005: 63).

The third main stream in acting approaches is the self-expressive approach. Jerzy Grotowski and Peter Brook are the most well-known advocates of this approach. The self-expressive acting style asks of the actor to present his/her most authentic, unembellished self on stage, with the intended effect of stripping the spectator of his/her defences in order to connect on an intimate level. The character serves as a vehicle for the actor's self-expression, which is contrary to the involvement style which some could argue advocates the opposite (Zarrilli, 2005: 63).

The theoretical division of "psychological" and "physical" approaches to actor training therefore continues to this day. As many actors have learned however, it is not an either/or phenomenon (Kemp, 2010: 8). The interpretations and applications may vary, but most theatre practitioners would agree that actor training in the West is still dominated by Stanislavsky's work (Kemp, 2010: 9).

As seen from this brief discussion of dominant acting approaches, the approaches differ with regard to emotional loci and the processes followed in accessing truthful acting. What these approaches agree on, though, is the importance of proper text analysis - something Stanislavsky was adamant about. In most script-based productions the actors and director investigate the written dialogue in the context of the given circumstances and the background story to determine what impulses produce the words – a process that is usually called table analysis, or table work. The decisions that emerge from this analysis are called interpretations (Kemp, 2010: 30).

Acting approaches may vary but that which remains the same, is the written text. Blau (in Zarrilli, 2005: 15) states: "I have no use for actors who know how to move but can't think. I maintain the text is the map to action". Zarrilli (2005: 214) also cites Jack Poggi (who visited the Moscow Theatre in 1969 to observe their acting training) as saying the following:

> I saw meticulous line-by-line coaching to clarify the meaning of the text. I saw no improvisations. The qualities I most admired in Russian actors, and the ones that seem to derive most directly from their training, are clarity and intelligence. They almost always seem to know exactly what they are doing.

Zarrilli (2005: 243) describes Hornby's call for an "End of Acting: A Radical View" (1992) not as an end of *all* acting, but rather as displacing "a Strasbergian method with a revised Stanislavskian based approach to character acting, emphasizing a return to the primacy of the dramatic text".

Of all the acting approaches mentioned, the Stanislavskian psychophysical approach is the one that resonates with me the most. This is the approach I teach. This is the approach I aim to follow as an actor during rehearsals of a play, provided I have the time (which is not often). What remains the same, regardless of what acting approach is being followed though, is the fact that all text-based theatre necessitates a thorough analysis of the text. What seems to stand central in all acting approaches dealing with a finished script as provided by a playwright, is the fact that the given circumstances - as actual or inferred information - cannot be ignored.

2.2 Text analysis

There is no single "correct" interpretation of a play, but an understanding of text analysis will help ensure that the interpretations are valid (Ball, 1983: 4). The dramatic text or script creates the world in which an actor must find his objectives, actions and eventually his character. It flows logically from this statement then that if there were to be factual inconsistencies or omissions in the text, an actor would have trouble in finding his situated actions, and as a consequence his character. It is for this reason that this section will focus on formalist text analysis[1] from the perspective of an actor. This distinction is important because it excludes a literary analysis[2] as well as a critical analysis[3]. I will not be critiquing the four texts' (selected for this study) efficacy in attaining their ideological, political or thematic goals, nor will I attempt an explanation of the texts. I will only search for the presence of proven factors that might lead to maternal filicide.

Text analysis from an actor's perspective implies a static reading of the text to delineate the different components of a drama, namely: (1) given circumstances, (2) background story, (3) progression and structure, and (4) character (Thomas, 2009: 38). A static reading is also sometimes called a table reading and refers to the fact that this type of analysis is usually done by a company (actors and director) seated around a table.

[1] "The search for playable dramatic values that reveal a central unifying pattern which forms or shapes a play from the inside and coordinates all its parts". (Thomas, 2009: xix)
[2] "A literary analysis explains a work of fiction, poetry or drama by means of interpretations. The goal of a literary analysis is to broaden and deepen your understanding of a work of literature" (Guidelines for Writing a Literary Critical Analysis, n.d.).
[3] "The process of actively and skilfully conceptualizing, applying, analysing, synthesizing, and evaluating information to reach an answer or conclusion" (Wikipedia, 2016: "Critical Thinking").

For the purposes of this study, I agree with Rynell's (2008: 25) definition of drama:

> Drama will here be defined as a narrative, conceived as a written text intended for scenic use, a text which is fictive, mimetic in some sense, and has the form of a contextualization of assumed human actions, verbal and nonverbal. These actions, carried out by fictive dramatis personae, are intended to be acted in real time by living persons – actors – in front of a public.

2.2.1 Given circumstances

At the start of all plays the reader or audience is presented with a unique combination of present and past that Stanislavsky called the given circumstances. These given circumstances are the facts of the play and are open to anyone who reads or watches the play. Thomas (2009: 39) writes that different practitioners use different terms for the idea of "given circumstances"; these being social context, texture, foundations of the plot, playwright's setting, or literary landscape. In the end they all refer to the same thing. Given circumstances are the specific context in which the action of the play takes place. Given circumstances are as important to a play as plot, structure, character and set: "They put the characters and audience into the 'here and now' of the action. Without the given circumstances, characters would exist in an abstract never-never land without any connection to real life" (Thomas, 2009: 39). Rynell (2008: 44) contends that for a reader or audience member to accept these given circumstances, they need to be analogous to how things are in real life: "Similarities in the implications of scenic events 'as they were in real life' are crucial for the understanding of them, their intelligibility".

Given circumstances comprise information concerning the following: time, location, society, economics, politics and law, spirituality, and the world of the play (Thomas, 2009: 40).

In some plays it is important to know the year and even season in which the action is set. This would be the case where historical context or even seasonal context is important for the full understanding of the play. In the case of maternal filicide, historical context could give an indication of societal beliefs at the given time and even information pertaining to legislative proceedings. In *Aalst* (McLean, 2007) for instance, the time of action[4] is very specifically 2001 as the audience would know that this was when the much reported on court case happened. The time of the action can be searched for in characters' dialogue, e.g. direct statements or references to year, historical people or historical happenings. This information could also sometimes be found in the stage directions or playwrights'

[4] Time of action refers to the specific time period (time span) that a play is set in and can range from minutes/hours to days/months/years; as opposed to dramatic time which is the amount of time that passes during the on-stage action (Gerber, 2015: 4).

notes.

Another important element of given circumstances is location – the physical environment. In most plays the action takes place in a general locale and in specific locales which can change as the play progresses. The general locale refers to the country, region or district in which the action is set (Thomas, 2009: 45). In traditional dramas the general and/or specific locale are often given in the playwright's notes and stage directions, but should be confirmed in the dialogue of the characters. In some plays location is inferred only. In the case of *Aalst* (McLean, 2007) the general locale would be Belgium, as the title of the play is the name of a Belgian town. There is dialogue referring specifically to the fact that the characters are in a court of law, but the specific locale is never mentioned. The assumption however can be made that the specific locale is the Court of Assize (the Belgian court for serious crimes where decisions cannot be appealed) (Tompt, 2005) as most audiences would know that the story they are seeing is the specific story of Maggie Strobbe and Luc de Winne. *And all the children cried* (Campbell & Jones, 2002) also never mention general locale overtly, but by putting Myra Hindley on stage, the time of action is placed in Britain as it is public knowledge that she is incarcerated there.

Plays often show social groups existing together. When considering society as an aspect of given circumstances, the most common social group (and the most important one in the plays discussed in this thesis) is the family. Thomas (2009: 50) writes that this is logical, because "we are all sons, daughters, sisters and brothers before we are anything else". Nuclear and extended family love, its absence, or its perversions form the foundation of many plays (Gerber. 2015: 10). Society has certain behavioural expectations regarding the family unit which could off course vary culturally, but most societies expect love to be present. In plays dealing with maternal filicide it is this familial love, or lack thereof, which would seem intrinsic to the onstage action. Friendships are sympathetic social bonds mostly formed by choice. As with family relationships, friendships come with societal expectations that may be confirmed or denied during the course of a play. Intimate or romantic love interests comprises another kind of social group outside the family (Gerber, 2015: 11). As with the previous social bonds, there exists societal expectations regarding this type of love and the adherence (or otherwise) to these expectations often constitute a large part of many plays' onstage action. A character's work colleagues forms yet another social group outside the family. Since most people spend at least a third of their day plying their trade, it would follow that their feelings regarding their occupation and the people they interact with at their workplace, would be important for the action of the play. Where characters are unemployed either by choice or because of other factors (as is the case in some of the plays discussed in this thesis), this could be indicative of social isolation, poor education or even a personality style.

According to Thomas (2009: 53), social rank "distinguishes a character's position or standing in society, differences which in general stem from wealth, power, formal education, or other material issues". In most modern plays, social standing is dependent on education, adherence to social rules, ethnicity, sexual orientation and economic or political power (Thomas, 2009: 53). Social standing (as a further aspect of given circumstances) plays a significant role in most of the plays that are discussed in this thesis as research found that it is usually poor, marginalised mothers with limited education and possible mental illness who commit filicide[5]. Identifying obvious or hidden social rank is thus essential in the understanding of a text. Social rules are the codes of conduct and shared beliefs regarded as true and necessary by the society in which the characters function. It is expected of characters to conform to these rules or standards. Modern Western society believes in individual rights whilst condemning dishonesty and antisocial behaviour. It is also thought that people must work for a living and be a useful member of society (Gerber, 2015: 12). Even though the characters in a play might not adhere to these social rules, they still know them to be the norm and any deviation asks for an explanation. In the case of maternal filicide this is especially true. Thomas (2009: 55) has the following to say about social standards:

> Social standards do not need to be proven or even stated in most plays because characters accept them as true without question. Social standards are often so important that violation produces shock, horror, moral revulsion, indignation, and ostracism, and even justifies the use of even more extreme penalties to enforce conformity. In former times, social standards were determined by established religion, class, politics, inherited family position and national culture. At the present time it is the social standards of science and business, the idea of equality and the social standards of the media and the dominant middle class that collectively determine the standards of belief and behaviour of most people.

A consumer oriented world is a consequence of modern society's belief in the importance of business. In most Western modern plays the economic system under which the characters function, is capitalism. As Thomas (2009: 57) points out, " since capitalism is based on individual freedom and free enterprise, it can be rewarding for successful entrepreneurs, but it can be very hard for those with limited financial talent, influence or resources". The economic situation of characters are often intrinsic to a play (Gerber, 2015: 12) and I argue that this is especially true where the situation is one of poverty. When a character lives on the breadline, he or she might be forced to commit desperate acts in order to survive. Poverty within a consumer oriented society, or the threat thereof, is evident

[5] See Chapter 3.

in all four dramas that are discussed in this thesis.

Politics and law as aspects of the given circumstances in a play refers to the specific country's laws under which the characters in the play live (Gerber, 2015: 14). In plays with maternal filicide as motif, these laws have been violated. This places the relevant characters in a criminal realm. I am of the opinion that it is usually not criminality per se that is interesting in a play, but the individual circumstances of a character that led to him or her becoming a criminal. It is also interesting that the filicidal mother in My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies (Meiring, 2011 unpublished) was sentenced to 280 hours community service for murder, Gail in *And all the children cried* (Jones and Campbell, 2002) was sentenced to eight years imprisonment for manslaughter, and the parents in *Aalst* (McLean, 2007) received life sentences for murder. What is of interest here is the difference in legal systems leading to different verdicts and sentencing. Also evident in these plays are the fact that, prior to the filicidal act, the mothers were functioning in an environment where respect for the laws of the country was arguably already eroded.

Thomas (2009: 60) defines spirituality as "any beliefs in divine, spiritual or supernatural powers that are obeyed, worshipped or respected". Characters without any spiritual beliefs are quite common in modern plays and as such I believe the absence of spirituality not to be of particular relevance. There have been documented cases of maternal filicide where the act was said to have happened because of a perceived divine command. I argue that these instances of religiosity could be indicative of psychosis rather than devoutness and would search for further indications of mental illness in an analysis of the text.

The given circumstances of a play – time, location, society, economics (social standing), politics and law, spirituality – work together to form the world of the play. It is through the characters' actions, more than the dialogue, that this world is revealed. In analysing a text, it is important to establish which of the elements of the given circumstances drive the characters and their environments. It is characters' different responses to the world of the play which gives rise to the action of the play as well as delineate identity (Gerber, 2015: 20).

2.2.2 Background story

Whereas given circumstances refer to the present situation of a character, the term "background story" refers to the character's past. This is the part of the play that never gets seen but is imperative for the understanding of the play by both the audience and the actors. The background story provides context for the onstage action (Rynell, 2008: 33). Thomas (2009: 70) writes that background story is usually provided by means of exposition which is also referred to as previous or antecedent action: "The word

exposition comes from the Latin word exposito, meaning to put forward or to expose and it has proven useful because exposition is a way of exposing the unseen parts of the play". Exposition gives the audience the information they need about the past to better understand the present and future to come. According to McGee (2001: 6), this is where the "conflict or action" begins. Background story could be stated explicitly or could be implied. Rynell (2008: 34) however warns that "conclusions about situations, characters or actions in the play must always be supported by the text, i.e. one cannot refer to ideas or theories which are inconsistent with data given or implied in the text".

Background story could take the following forms: events, character descriptions, and feelings (Thomas, 2009: 77). A background story event is something of great importance that happened in the past and is vital to the play. Gerber (2015: 23) warns that a reader must take care not to believe everything a character says, though. It is not because characters lie, but they tell their own versions of the truth as they see it. Yet, even a lie told as the truth can be revealing. Discussions of the events of the past could also possibly lead to character descriptions of characters who were involved. Again one must remember not to trust everything a character might say regarding another character. Past feelings of characters as revealed through background story are, however, important to gather a full understanding of these characters' present situation (Gerber, 2015: 23).

Background story could be of particular interest in plays dealing with maternal filicide, specifically in reference to the mother's past. As will be discussed in chapter three, much research on maternal filicide found childhood trauma to be indicative of possible mental illness in adulthood. In *Aalst* (McLean, 2007) and *And all the children cried* (Campbell and Jones, 2002) the filicidal act is in fact the background story event without which the court case (*Aalst*) or impending parole board meeting (*And all the children cried*) would not have happened. Gerber's warning not to believe every word the characters say is pertinent to the analysis of the plays dealing with maternal filicide. A history of criminality and mental illness have both been associated with filicide. As will be discussed in chapter three, criminals and people suffering from some personality disorders are known to lie.

2.2.3 Progression and structure

It could be said that the structure of a play determines the extent to which an audience will be attentive and receptive to the story that is being told. All good storytellers know that a story successfully told depends not only on the content of the story but also in the way in which it is told. Although an understanding of the progression and structure of a play is therefore important for all theatre practitioners in order to stage a successful performance, it is not relevant to my research question – which is to ascertain whether the proven factors leading to maternal filicide is present in the texts

analysed. I will primarily focus on the content (given circumstances, background story and characters) of the plays that will be discussed. In view of this (but for the sake of comprehensiveness) I will give a very brief outline of what is meant by the progression and structure of a play.

Thomas (2009: 129) posits that "plays are written to create the impression that things are moving, that they are getting somewhere. By this we do not always mean a chronological movement but sometimes a psychological one". He continues by explaining the notion of progression:

> Progressions are arranged in groups according to their size called beats, units, scenes and acts. Progressions help to create interest, maintain suspense, and develop the story logically. This smallest dramatic progression is called a beat. In a play, beats work like paragraphs in prose. The purpose of a beat is to introduce, develop and conclude a single topic, view, issue or idea that adds to the progress and growth of the play. Beats work together with one another in the development of larger progressions called units. In other words, while a beat is a group of related lines, units are a group of related beats. A scene is a collection of units marked by a change of time or place and its units are related in such a way that they form a tiny play in themselves. A scene is therefore composed of several units. (Thomas, 2009: 130, 131)

Gerber (2015: 40) writes that the arrangement of the progressions and their relationship to each other is called the structure of a play. According to Thomas (2009: 145), the elements that are usually looked for during an analysis of the structure of a play, are: point of attack (the moment that the play begins in relation to the background story); the inciting or primary event (background event that results in the actions of the play); climaxes; and the resolution. McGee (2001: 6) defines a climax as "a prominent peak of emotional intensity that produces a significant change in the characters. This is the point of greatest emotional tension in the drama". The resolution of a play (sometimes called the denouement) is what follows after the play's main climax. According to McGee (2001: 6) "this is where the loose ends are wrapped up".

2.2.4 Character

In discussing the concept of character as written for stage, it is important to first understand what many theatre practitioners understand this word to mean. This will be explained in the first part of this section. Then I will look at the features in a play associated with the formation of character, namely: major (macro or super) and minor (micro) objectives; conflict; values; and personality.

When referring to the characters of a play, we are in fact referring to a pattern of actions that identifies that character, "what Aristotle called habitual action (action acquired by habit or use)" (Thomas,

2009: 168). Rynell (2008: 70) also cites Aristotle as writing that drama “is an imitation, not of men, but of action and life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action”. This would mean that character is not a passive entity with a fixed set of identifiers, but rather a consistent pattern of actions. Rynell (2008: 43) cites Strindberg who wrote:

> The mere notion of character is tied to an idea about something stable, about recurrent characteristic traits, and that people who do not comply with such general patterns, on the stage and in life alike, are regarded as lacking character.

Rynell (2008: 16) points to the fact that the word for the written theatre text, drama, originates in a word meaning “action” and that people who perform plays are called actors: “This testifies to the importance of the element of action in theatre, both in its written and acted form”. Actions take place in a context and result in a change. I disagree with Keir Ilam's (in Rynell, 2008: 17) definition of action in theatre as “there is a being, conscious of his doings, who intentionally brings about a change of some kind, to some end, in a given context.” Action need not always be conscious or intentional. I agree with Ball (1983: 9) who sees action with regards to script analysis as a very specific thing: “action occurs when something happens that makes or permits something else to happen”. This definition allows for even a simple “how are you feeling?” (half an action) and answered with “I am fine” (the other half of the action) to construe an action. This releases the concept of action from any conscious effort to bring about change. Who we are lies in what we do. The same can be said of the characters in a play and it is for this reason that the actions a character performs are vital to an understanding of the character.

Gerber (2015: 44) writes that the characters in a play may seem very predictable when compared to real people in that they are often preoccupied with a single overpowering goal. Macro objectives are usually paramount. (The term objective refer to what the character wants.) A character would be concerned about getting parole for instance and not about the dryness of her skin. Rynell (2008: 24) states the following:

> Stanislavsky was of the opinion that the actor's most important analytical task should be to find the character's super-objective (the spine, in his terminology), the basic drive that determines the character's behaviour in the entire play and throughout the acts, scenes, units and beats of which the play is composed.

Merlin (2001: 22) argues that an objective usually stems from the desire to change the on-stage partner's attitude towards you, and distilled down to its essence, it's often to do with one of two primary instincts: attraction towards (“I want you to love me”) or repulsion from (“I want you to fear

me"). Rynell (2008: 32) calls this search for characters' objectives action analysis. He argues that an actor should, however, not only be asking what a character's goal is but in which situation that goal is strived towards.

> Every course of action depends in essential ways upon its material and social circumstances. Rather than attempting to abstract action away from its circumstances and represent it as a rational plan, the approach is to study how people use their circumstances to achieve their goals. (Rynell, 2008: 40)

Minor objectives stem from the macro or super-objective and may change during the course of the play but should always be linked to the realization of the super-objective. Whereas the super-objective of a character can usually be outlined in one sentence, the minor objectives may have several sentences. Thomas (2009: 172) writes that "if objections are what a character wants, actions are what a character does to get what he/she wants". The actions of a character refer to verbal as well as non-verbal performance attributes such as body language and facial expressions. I am of the opinion that the objectives (major or minor) of a character might in some plays be an unconscious goal not recognised by the character. This does not make it any less of a possible driving force in a play and as such should be identified by the theatre practitioner.

One of the key features of character is conflict. Thomas (2009:77) sees conflict in theatre as a very broad term:

> Conflict is not a single narrow concept and appears in several different forms in plays. There may be conflict between characters, between character and environment, between character and destiny or the forces of nature, between character and ideas, or even among the feelings of a single character.

I want to add to this list the inner conflict certain plays might ignite in an audience member. In a play such as *Aalst* (McLean, 2007) there is onstage conflict between the voice and the filicidal couple, but being documentary theatre, the true intended conflict might actually reside within the spectator. The same could be said for My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies (Meiring, 2011) where there is tremendous onstage familial and societal conflict, but where the true conflict arguably lies in the audience's response to this story of a mother who allegedly killed her son in self-defence. The same can be said, in fact, for most theatre of advocacy. Gerber (2015: 45) writes that not all types of conflict result in the same kinds of tension and that distinctions can be made between intellectual tensions and emotional tensions. This distinction is not relevant to the purposes of this thesis, as I will not be analysing the texts based on type of tension created, but only identify proven factors that could lead

a mother to kill her child. These factors would inevitably involve some if not all of the types of conflict mentioned by Thomas (2009:77). The possible conflict within an audience resulting from watching these plays and even my own inner conflicts regarding the mothers I will be "analysing" is also not relevant to this thesis, as these conflicts speak to the political message of the plays.

Karpman (1968: 40) argues that drama consists of role reversals as a result of conflict. Conflict brings about change. He contends that "only three roles are necessary in drama analysis to depict the emotional reversals that are drama. These action roles are the Persecutor, Rescuer, and Victim" (Karpman, 1968: 40). This seemingly simplistic definition of what constitutes drama might initially seem to fall short in plays dealing with maternal filicide as it is nearly impossible to determine who the victim (apart from the dead children), the persecutor and especially the rescuer, is. However the more I consider the fact that his definition asks of these roles to be reversed in order to make drama, the more I suspect that these reversals might accommodate the ambiguity inherent in all plays dealing with the filicidal motif.

The values of a character should not be confused with spirituality in that these do not relate to a belief system but rather result in the formation of a personality. Thomas (2009: 182) writes the following about character values:

> They affect their personal, family and social lives, their work, and their leisure. They define their reasons for choosing to be who they are. Values arise from personal beliefs about things as conscience, public- and family-mindedness, ambition, success and pleasure. In some characters, the values may form a pattern of virtues, they may be vices, and in others a mixture of the two.

The word personality is derived from the Latin word for persona which referred to a theatrical mask (Annandale, 2016). An actor would thus be identified as a certain type of character by the putting on of a specific mask. The wearing of the mask would give spectators the information they need to immediately know what type of character they are seeing. It follows then that the personality of a character refers to a set of identifiable traits (behaviours, cognitions and emotions) as manifested by an individual which determines how he or she will be perceived by others. Personality traits may shift and change during the course of a play depending on the situation, but there is nevertheless a discernible pattern that remains recognisable (Gerber, 2015: 55).

The final issue pertaining to character, is that of complex (round) characters and simple characters (also sometimes called types). Thomas (2009: 189) contends that the complex characters are most often the main characters in a play, because they have the capacity for insight. This in contrast to

simple characters who, according to McGee (2001: 5) “display a single mental state, feeling or action throughout the play and often have a function only”. I disagree with Thomas that complex characters are per definition insightful. With particular reference to the texts that will be discussed in this thesis, it must be pointed out that these mothers had, for the most part, no insight into their situations. Yet they are undisputedly complex or rounded characters. I argue that, as is the case with most theatre of advocacy, the insight lies within the audience member and that this might be precisely what the playwrights intended, thus making the audience one of the main characters in the play. The distinction between complex and simple characters is not really of relevance to the factual analysis of the texts though, and I will leave it at that.

It is apparent that all acting is embodied. The actor uses his or her body to communicate meaning to an audience: “This is accomplished by language, by nonverbal communication, and by mirror mechanisms that support empathy” (Kemp, 2010: 185). It is therefore impossible to determine whether, in performance, the filicidal characters that feature in the dramatic texts discussed in chapters five to eight, will be successful, i.e. perceived as truthful by an audience. What can be assessed through text analysis though, is whether the playwrights adhered to empirically proven environmental, psychiatric, psychological and social factors that might conceivably lead a character to commit maternal filicide. The given circumstances, background story and character components would yield the most information.

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter had as its aim to give a brief overview of the most predominant approaches to acting. What became evident is that most text-based productions still view thorough text analysis as vital to the proper understanding of a play. The section on formalist text analysis delineates how most theatre practitioners working in the style of realism would read a text in an effort to understand it completely and consequently present it to others. For the purposes of this thesis I will focus my analysis of the texts mentioned in chapter one on given circumstances, background story and character as revealed through situated actions (conscious or unconscious) and conflict. In other words, I am interested in where the filicidal mother comes from, where she is now and who she is as manifested in her own and others’ behaviour.

Rynell (2008: 23) writes that all information pertaining to a drama is accessible through analysis of the written text. I agree with him except where the drama deals with a subject the actor is not informed about. This would necessitate further research of that particular subject. In order to establish whether the proven factors that might contribute to maternal filicide are present in the selected dramatic texts,

it was therefore necessary to do a brief literary review of the dominant fields of research pertaining to maternal filicide. These will be discussed in the following chapter.

In my acting career of twenty years as well as in my teaching career of ten years, I have often made the mistake of disrespecting the written word. I have committed most of the reading mistakes Thomas (2009: xxxiv) refers to, including: affective fallacy (judging a play or character based on personal ideals); faulty generalisation (jumping to conclusions based on only a small amount of "evidence" and ignoring "evidence" to the contrary); reductiveness (reducing a character or play to its simplest form); and intentional fallacy (focusing on how successful the playwright was in achieving his or her intention with the play, instead of attending to the play itself). The latter reading mistake is especially one I must take care to avoid in the analysis of the texts for this thesis.

Chapter 3: Maternal Filicide

The aim of this chapter is to define maternal filicide and review different perspectives on why this crime occurs. I will firstly provide possible definitions of filicide (as determined by the age of the victim) and briefly look at the history of filicide as background to the discussion to follow. Secondly the nature of violence and specifically female aggression will be considered before giving an overview of classification systems pertaining to maternal filicide. This is followed by a discussion of the three dominant perspectives regarding maternal filicide, namely the psychiatric, psychological and sociological perspectives. In the last sections of this chapter I will briefly review the child development theories, the neurobiological perspective as well as the feminist perspective on maternal filicide to illustrate the truly complex nature of this crime.

3.1. What is maternal filicide and when did mothers start killing their children?

Although there seems to be varying definitions of filicide (determined by the age of the child), I will adhere to the view that filicide refers to the murder of a child older than 24 hours committed by his or her parent(s). The term infanticide is used when the murdered child is under the age of one year old and neonaticide, a term coined by Phillip Resnick in 1970, refers to the killing of a new-born by his or her parent(s) within the first 24 hours of life (West, 2007; Davies, 2008: 15; Schwartz & Isser, 2000: 1). As Davies (2008: 16) pointed out, there is thus some overlap between filicide and infanticide in that "filicide can also occur during the first year of the infant's life, however, in these instances postpartum disorders are *not* a *feature"*. This means that only in the cases of neonaticide and infanticide, would postpartum disorders be considered as a possible contributing factor to the crime.

Although the legal aspects of filicide (legislature and punishment) are beyond the scope of this study, it is notable that filicide and neonaticide are against the law in all countries. Although there are countries with legislature that differentiate child homicide by the parents from other homicides, making it a lesser crime, it is still a crime. This was not always the case, as will be seen in the brief discussion of the history of filicide.

For the purposes of this study the focus will be on maternal filicide which is the killing of a child by his/her mother.

When one looks at history, it becomes clear that the killing of one's children is not a new phenomenon. Spinelli (2003: 4) writes that records from the Babylonian and Chaldean civilizations, "dating from as far back as 4000 to 2000 B.C.", make reference to infanticide. Archaeological evidence suggests that infant murders was a common occurrence among early people because it enabled them to control

population growth and to reduce the burden placed on the tribe by unhealthy new-borns (Spinelli, 2003: 5). Schwartz and Isser (2000: 2) state that the killing of new-born infants occurred for a variety of reasons: sacrifice, primitive birth control, eugenics, shame, and fear of punishment for adultery or illegitimacy. According to West (2007) the theory of evolution permits a "more objective and less emotionally charged" assessment of filicide:

> The goal of any species, including humans, is to procreate, and those factors that allow for the creation of the next generation are advantageous. In a world with limited resources, the offspring who are weaker (those with obvious physical deformities) or are not created by the careful selection of a mate (those that are the product of rape) are more likely to be sacrificed in favour of stronger candidates. Younger offspring are more likely to be eliminated because less time and energy has been invested in their care. Finally, younger females are more willing to sacrifice offspring with the understanding that they have a longer period of fertility remaining in comparison with older females.

Even in the more civilised ancient cultures of Greece and Rome, people were killing their children for reasons ranging from population control to eugenics to illegitimacy (Spinelli, 2003: 4). According to Schwartz and Isser (2000: 4), exposure (leaving a baby outside to die) of new-borns in ancient Greece was not only allowed, but sometimes enforced by law; weak or deformed infants were killed "for fear that they would become a ward of and cost to the state".

Infanticide was also common to non-Western ancient cultures. Female infanticide specifically, was a common practice in pre-Islamic communities in seventh-century Arabia: "Scholars attribute this to the status of women as "property" in that society" (Spinelli, 2003: 5). Jimmerson (in Schwartz and Isser, 2000: 2) writes of ancient Chinese texts from as early as 2000 B.C. referencing cases of infanticide.

Spinelli (2003: 6) writes that the infanticide that occurred in early Judeo-Christian Europe was "mostly due to poverty and scarce familial resources", but that the Catholic Church's denunciation of children born out of wedlock (by insisting they be called illegitimate), also encouraged infanticide, albeit implicitly. In fact, the relationship between illegitimacy and infanticide was so entrenched that infanticide was thought of as a crime committed only by unmarried mothers and the earliest criminal laws relating to infanticide referred to the crime of "bastardy infanticide – infanticide committed by an unmarried woman (An Act to Prevent the Destroying and Murthering of Bastard Children 1623)" (Spinelli, 2003: 7). Punishments were severe and included death by drowning or being buried alive (Spinelli, 2003: 7).

The idea of infanticide as a crime only committed by immoral or desperate women persisted until the start of the twentieth century. It was at that time that two French psychiatrists, Jean-Etienne Esquirol and Victor Louis Marcé, introduced the idea that infanticide might be linked to mental illness of the mother. These psychiatrists were the first to propose "a causal relationship between pregnancy, childbirth, and subsequent maternal mental illness" (Mendlowicz et al., 1998 in Spinelli, 2003: 8). This viewpoint became very popular and soon mental illness was seen as an important contributing factor in infanticide (Spinelli, 2003: 8).

As seen in this brief overview of the history of filicide, this crime has been committed throughout the ages by a diversity of societies for a number of reasons. It is evident though, that the history speaks of infanticide and neonaticide almost exclusively. There seems to be no explanations for the killing of older children. Another notable finding is that the reasons of past generations for killing their offspring, seem not to hold water in today's advanced societies (Spinelli, 2003: 10). In most recent researched instances of filicide, the child was not killed because of being illegitimate, female, a burden to the tribe or for sacrificial reasons. This might be why what is referred to as the "mad or bad" hypothesis originated. The mad mother kills because of hormones and the bad mother because she is violent and evil. Schwartz and Isser (2007: 3) ascribe this oversimplification of a multi-factorial phenomenon to "cultural assumptions of mothers as self-sacrificing, compassionate, caring, and, above all, loving". Mothers who do not adhere to these assumptions are therefore considered unnatural and thus either "mad or bad" (Spinelli, 2003: 10; Schwartz & Isser, 2007: 3; Shelton, Hoffer and Muirhead 2015:1).

3.2 Some perspectives on the nature of violence

Maternal filicide is a crime. A mother causes the death of her child. Intentional murder usually constitutes a violent act on the part of the perpetrator and as such I feel it important to look at what is meant by the term "violence" as it pertains to maternal filicide. The following section will firstly look at what is meant by the term violence and then briefly discuss society's perceptions about violent behaviour as being appropriate for men but not women and how that, coupled with societal expectations regarding specifically motherhood, might impact on a vulnerable mother.

Merriam Webster.com (n.d.) defines violence partly as "the use of physical force to harm someone" and the Oxford Dictionary (2016) defines violence as "behaviour involving physical force intended to hurt, damage or kill someone or something". In a study released by the World Health Organisation in 2006, they defined violence as follows:

> Violence is the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself,

> another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation.

All of these definitions make the use of physical force a prerequisite to an act being defined as violent. I argue that this does not take into account the fact that many mothers kill their children without the use of physical force. Anderson's (in Marshall, 2012) definition of passive violence as "the conscious ignoring of the physical, psychological, and emotional needs of a person and the conscious failure to ensure the safety of someone under one's care" seems more applicable to many researched cases of maternal filicide. Where Anderson's definition of passive violence does away with the element of physical force, it still posits that violence is a conscious act, though. Again, this definition does not fully fit the violence perpetrated by filicidal mothers because, as will be discussed later in this study, there are many recorded cases of maternal filicide where the intent to kill was absent. It is for this reason that I prefer Davies's (2008: 14) definition of violence which is "a loss of control of aggressive impulse leading to action".

Humans have always acted violently towards one another as well as towards other species (Shelton et al (2015: 7). Although men are, broadly speaking, more prone to violence than women, research shows that women commit more child homicides than men and more often physically abuse their children (Pearson in Shelton et al, 2015: 13). The reason for this lies in the fact that society condones and even encourages male violence, whereas female violence is seen as unfeminine and unacceptable. This leads to women committing violence in the privacy of their homes with the victims usually being spouses, partners, children and themselves (Shelton et al, 2015: 7; Davies, 2008: 1).

I have mentioned earlier that many of the explanations for maternal infanticide in previous centuries are not applicable to modern society and more pointedly, that filicide (the killing of a child older than one year) seems to be a modern phenomenon. I have also mentioned that there still seems to exist a conception of women, and especially mothers, as nurturing and self-sacrificing. These conceptions might be responsible for many mothers' distress when, after having children, she finds that motherhood is not necessarily instinctive, natural and fulfilling. Kruger (2013) calls this the "ambivalent nature of motherhood" and writes that mothers might experience severe stress when their experience of motherhood "conflicts with dominant motherhood discourses in which motherhood is idealized". As a consequence, distressed, disempowered mothers could become violent toward the only thing they do have power over: their children.

I agree with Davies (2008) when she writes that a woman's violent act needs to be understood within the holistic context of her life. White and Kowalski (in Davies 2008: 2) indicate that, when taking

this holistic view, “the problem of female aggression is located within interpersonal and institutionalized patterns of a patriarchal society”, as opposed to purely intrapersonal attributions. Mothers who kill their children usually act spontaneously and a combination of complex circumstances usually leads to this terrible crime (Davies, 2008: 2). It is a multidimensional phenomenon where arguably not only the mother who kill is to blame, but also society who allows such desperate circumstances to exist where the only perceived solution is murder. The point of this is not to excuse child homicide, but rather, to illustrate that it is “far from unthinkable” (Meyer et al in Davies, 2008: 64). As Davies (2008: 64) also points out, the vast majority of child homicides are carried out by women with no previous criminal record. This suggests that this phenomenon is not about women who are simply “mad” or “bad”. In an effort to understand maternal filicide, many researchers have done numerous studies over the past decades. These studies have mostly been done with psychiatric literature reviews and in some cases police records and court transcripts. This research has led to many classification systems pertaining to the crime of maternal filicide. The following section delineates the most dominant of these.

3.3 Classifying (maternal) filicide

Davies (2008: 16) writes that no single classification system can comprehensively explain the complex phenomenon of maternal filicide and that each system has its strengths and weaknesses.

West (2007) writes that probably the most influential classification system of child homicide was created in 1969 by Phillip Resnick. Resnick did a literature review on child homicide from 1751 to 1967, finding pertinent articles in thirteen languages (Mugavin, 2005: 65). He analysed 131 cases of filicide committed by both fathers and mothers that were examined in psychiatric literature dating from 1751 to 1967 (West, 2007).

Resnick became the first researcher to propose a filicide classification system based on motive. The system proposed five categories:

1: Altruism – the killing of a child to relieve him/her of real or imagined suffering (Shelton et al, 2015: 38). Marchetti (in Albertyn, 2015: 57) explains this as seeing “murder as a rescue action, whereby the parent romanticises death as a better option to life and sees death as a better option for the family, including the children.” Mugavin (2008) writes that this type of filicide differs dramatically from other child homicides in that the murder is committed as an act of love. Mercy killing is often associated with parental suicide. When this is the case, the mother may have decided to end her life, but feels unable to leave her child alive for fear that he/she will not be taken care of properly.

2: Acute psychosis – severely mentally ill parents who kill their children (Shelton et al, 2015: 38). Mugavin (2005: 66) writes that parents who suffer from hallucinations, epilepsy, or delirium fall into this category as well as those cases in which no explicit motive could be determined.

3: Unwanted child – the parent never wanted the child or no longer wants the child (Shelton et al, 2015: 38).

4: Accident – the unintentional killing of a child as a result of physical abuse (Shelton et al, 2015: 38). According to Mugavin (2005: 66) these filicides are viewed as accidental because of the absence of homicidal intent.

5: Spousal revenge – the parent kills the child to punish his/her partner (Shelton et al, 2015: 38). Euripides's Medea famously falls into this category.

West notes that in 49 percent of the cases that Resnick reviewed, altruism was found to be the motive for the murders. The least common reason for a parent to kill his/her child, is spousal revenge, which accounted for only two percent of the filicides (West, 2007).

Shelton et al (2015: 38) write that Scott devised a classification system based on "the source of the impulse to kill". Although the system has limitations, Scott's shift away from motive opened the field of research to accommodate factors outside the perpetrator such as the environment. Scott's categories were: (1) killing of an unwanted child; (2) mercy killing; (3) aggression linked to severe mental pathology; (4) "stimulus arising outside of the victim"; and (5) "stimulus arising from the victim" (Shelton et al, 2015: 38). Most murders seem to be committed when inhibitions, foresight, reason, empathy, and reflexivity are diminished. The person is acting at a primal level and stress, passion, need, deprivation, or absence of love or agency may trigger a parent to kill a child (Mugavin, 2005: 70).

Davies (2009: 20) points out that many more classification systems were proposed over the years with various slight adjustments, of which d'Orban's and Bourget and Bradford's were the most prominent. A study done by Meyer, Oberman, White & Rone in 2001 analysed news reports of 219 filicides and as a result proposed a classification system based on the largest number of cases to date. Their categories were (1) ignored pregnancy; (2) filicide associated with physical abuse; (3) filicide associated with neglect; (4) intended filicide; and (5) assisted/forced filicide (Shelton et al, 2015:38).

Yet another classification system mentioned by Shelton et al (2015) is that of McKee. McKee's classification system did not focus on motive, method, or source of filicidal impulse, but on the profiles of the murdering mothers themselves. Unlike other classification systems, he only evaluated

filicidal mothers and found them to belong to one of five categories: (1) detached, uninvolved mothers; (2) abusive and neglectful mothers; (3) psychotic and/or depressed mothers; (4) revengeful mothers; and (5) psychopathic mothers. McKee's system was the first to posit psychopathy as associated with maternal filicide. Psychopathic mothers, as described by McKee, were found to be "unempathic women whose relationship with the victim was one of exploitation and indulgence. They use their children to satisfy their own needs and wishes" (Shelton et al, 2015: 39).

Davies (2008: 16) and Shelton et al (2015: 37) point out that these classification systems have their limitations in that classification based on motive is inherently abstract, because it "requires the researcher's subjective assessment of the mother's behaviour" (Lewis & Bunce in Shelton et al, 2015: 37). The information or data that researchers use in developing classification systems have been interpreted "several times over beginning with the real, perceived, or psychotic interpretation of events by the subject and then again as the researcher engages in a projection of self onto the mother's subjective explanation of the given scenario" (Shelton et al, 2015: 37). Although classification systems have their place in the realm of clinical research, a more in-depth examination of the factors associated with maternal filicide would be necessary for me to properly analyse the dramatic texts selected for this study. In view of this, I will discuss the most dominant perspectives as relating to maternal filicide for the remainder of this chapter.

3.4 Different perspectives on maternal filicide

When one looks at media coverage worldwide of filicide, society seems both fascinated and appalled by parents and specifically mothers killing their own children. Because it is still seen as unnatural, researchers have long looked for explanations as to why filicide still occurs in modern Western societies where eugenics or the survival of the tribe is not as important as it was centuries ago. The search has been in diverse domains, including psychology, psychiatry, sociology, history and anthropology. The three dominant perspectives that emerged in this regard during the past few decades are the psychiatric, psychological and sociological perspectives. Although these are separate fields of knowledge, "they frequently operate in conjunction with each other in that both intrapsychic and interpersonal dynamics play a role in the act of maternal filicide" (Davies, 2008: abstract).

West (2007) posits that filicide is a complex and multifactorial phenomenon and that it is therefore nearly impossible to establish a consistent profile of a mother who will kill her offspring.

3.4.1 Psychiatric and psychological perspectives

Research on maternal filicide have found certain mental disorders to be present in most mothers who

kill their children. Although these conditions are often not the only contributing factors leading to the crime, mental disorder presents in the majority of cases where a mother kills her child. Davies (2008: xxi) states that The American Psychiatric Association delineates mental disorder as

> a clinically significant behavioural or psychological syndrome or pattern that occurs in an individual and that is associated with present distress (e.g., a painful symptom) or disability (i.e., impairment in one or more important areas of functioning) or with a significantly increased risk of suffering death, pain, disability, or an important loss of freedom. In addition, this syndrome or pattern must not be merely an expectable and culturally sanctioned response to a particular event, for example, the death of a loved one.

McKee (in Shelton et al 2015: 27) states that research on filicidal mothers have found that they often present with a history of mental illness and that psychiatric treatments prior to the filicidal act, are well documented.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), offers diagnostic categories and standard criteria for classification purposes. The DSM is revised every few years as new data becomes available and the latest, the DSM-V was published in 2013. Like its predecessor, the DSM-V organizes psychiatric conditions into five fields (axes) relating to different attributes of disorder or functionality. Axis I comprises all clinical conditions except for those found on Axis II. Axis II account for personality disorders and mental retardation. Axis III comprises any medical conditions that might be relevant to the treatment of a person. Axis IV delineates that person's psychosocial and environmental conditions and Axis V gives an assessment of the person's level of functioning within society using a 100-point scale where 1 indicates severe impairment in functioning. (Sue, Sue & Sue, 2015: 84).

The Axis I disorders mostly associated with filicidal mothers are depression, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. These disorders may require psychotherapy as well as medication (Sue et al, 2010: 85, Shelton et al, 2015: 27). Depression is diagnosed when the following symptomatology exists: depressed mood most times, for a two week period; diminished interest or pleasure; weight changes; sleep problems; psycho-motor retardation or agitation; loss of energy; feelings of worthlessness; trouble concentrating or making decisions; thoughts of death (Sue et al, 2010: 306). Bipolar disorder is diagnosed when the person has periods of depressive and/or at least one manic episode. Other symptoms are: grandiosity; decreased sleep; more talkative; racing thoughts; distractibility; psycho-motor agitation; increased and decreased involvement in pleasurable activities (Sue et al, 2010: 328). Schizophrenia is diagnosed when some of the following symptoms are present for at least six months:

active symptoms like hallucinations, delusions, disorganized speech, and behaviour; and negative symptoms of flat affect and lack of motivation (Sue et al, 2010: 366). These Axis I disorders are treated with medication primarily and levels of functioning could improve dramatically.

On Axis II, some personality disorders are associated with maternal filicide. Shelton et al (2015: 32) state that for a personality disorder to be diagnosed, two or more of the following fields of functioning need to be impaired: perception and interpretation (cognition); emotional response (affect); interpersonal functioning; and/or impulse control. Personality disorders are treated with psychotherapy although they tend to be "highly resistant to change" (Fulford, 1996). A personality disorder develops because of numerous factors including childhood trauma, genetic vulnerability and the primary caretaker's attachment style (Sue et al, 2010: 231). Attachment theory will be discussed later in this chapter under child development theories. Shelton et al (2015: 32) cite a study done by Bierer, Yehuda, Schmeidler, Mitropoulou, New & Silverman (2003) where "78% of 182 subjects who had experienced some form of child abuse or trauma were diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, antisocial personality disorder, and/or anxiety-related personality disorders".

Most research points to personality disorders as being extremely prevalent in cases of fatal child abuse and borderline personality disorder specifically, have been closely associated with accidental filicide due to child battering. Borderline personality disorder is diagnosed where the following symptoms are present: unstable moods; impulsivity; aggression and hostility; disturbed relatedness; lack of coherent sense of self; and dysthymia (mild depression) (Preißler, Dziobek, Ritter, Heekeren and Roepke, 2010: 1-2; Sue et al, 2010: 214). Filicide studies have determined that chronic child abuse often escalated prior to the murder which could be indicative of poor impulse control, labile moods and aggression; all of which are consistent with borderline personality disorder (Shelton et al, 2015: 33).

Another personality disorder associated with maternal filicide, is narcissistic personality disorder. Narcissistic personality disorder is diagnosed where a pervasive and enduring pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or reality), arrogance, manipulation of others, lack of empathy and need for admiration and attention, manifests (Sue et al, 2010: 216). Shelton et al (2015: 34) describe a study done by Warren and South in 2002 where a sample of 261 women, who were detained in a maximum-security prison for violent crimes, were studied. The women who exhibited narcissistic symptomology presented with high levels of aggression, impulsivity, and a general lack of remorse. Warren and South found that women with narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) were "eight times more likely to be incarcerated for interpersonal violence and murder than those not diagnosed with NPD" (Shelton et al, 2015: 34).

A third personality disorder associated with maternal filicide, is antisocial personality disorder. There is much debate amongst clinicians about the dual use of the terms psychopathy and antisocial personality disorder. In 1980 psychopathy was renamed antisocial personality disorder in the DSM-III and whereas psychopathy was defined in terms of affective and interpersonal traits such as self-absorption, cunning, shallow affect and lack of empathy and remorse (Cleckley & Hare in Hare 1996), antisocial personality disorder was defined by “persistent violations of social norms, including lying, stealing, truancy, inconsistent work and traffic arrests” (Hare, 1996). Since no classification system allows for a diagnosis titled "psychopathy", I will refer to this disorder as antisocial personality disorder. It is interesting that antisocial personality disorder is viewed differently from the other personality disorders in that, although women with this disorder who kill their children do so because of being psychologically disturbed, they are usually found guilty of murder and sent to maximum security prisons (Mugavin, 2005: 69).

Shelton et al (2015: 35) argue that, in all likelihood, many more maternal filicide cases can be linked to personality disorders than are currently reported, due to the fact that most sufferers of personality disorders do not seek treatment and as such is never diagnosed. They argue that this may be because people with personality disorders usually blame their discomfort on external factors and not as residing within themselves. In an effort to relieve this discomfort, some sufferers might self-medicate and this could lead to substance abuse which is often found in people with personality disorders.

Although Axis I disorders could present with severe symptomatology such as psychotic episodes, making the illness very visible, Axis II disorders may not be as easily recognisable. Personality is a relatively stable set of cognitions, behaviours and beliefs which develop through a combination of biopsychosocial factors (Shelton et al, 2015: 31). Some people with personality disorders might only be perceived as odd or eccentric, or dramatic and emotional, or anxious and fearful (Sue et al, 2010: 231). The problem then seems to be that most personality disorders are diagnosed only after a crime has been committed, when it is too late.

3.4.2 Sociological perspectives: psychosocial factors

According to Davies (2008: 61) much research supports the notion that “the majority of mothers who kill their children suffer from deep personal inadequacies, serious personality disorders, and/or Axis I psychiatric illnesses”. However, other research suggest that maternal filicide seldom occurs within an environmentally stable context. The murdering mother often has a history of childhood trauma, criminality and/or limited education. Her adult environment might consist of: limited access to financial and societal support; deteriorating mental health; substance abuse; violent and abusive

relationships; caring for at least one child; and societal marginalisation (Davies, 2008: 61; Shelton et al, 2015: 2; Mugavin 2005: 71; West, 2007). Mugavin (2005: 69) points out that the existing classification systems are limited in scope in that they emphasize “psychopathologic and or biopathologic factors”. She argues that a fuller understanding of maternal filicide can only ever be achieved if the sociological factors contributing to the formation of mental disorders, be taken into account. Shelton et al (2015: 2) write that some studies have in fact found psychosocial stress, and not mental illness, to be the primary cause of maternal filicide. Many researchers therefor refer to the above mentioned sociological factors as psychosocial factors, thereby acknowledging the relationship between environment and mental health. Stroud (2008: 487) uses Howe's (2002) definition of psychosocial factors which is “the interplay between the individual's psychological condition and the social environment”. I will use this term for the remainder of this study in acknowledgement of the reciprocal nature of the psyche and the social environment.

Social environment, according to Kimmel (in Mugavin, 2008), “concern the broad, dynamic, multiple, and highly complex constellation of factors that shape individuals within a given historical context”. Mugavin (2008) writes that factors specifically relevant to the issue of maternal filicide are intra-family violence, substance abuse, the disintegration of the family unit and the marginalisation of the weaker section of society (women and children). Modern societies, in particular, have failed struggling mothers. The past few decades have seen the extended family dwindle to the nuclear family and more often than not, the single-parent family. It is especially difficult for single mothers who are survivors of childhood trauma to cope with the relentless stress of raising children in isolation and without support.

3.4.3 Child Development Theories

As mentioned earlier, the development of mental disorders and specifically personality disorders, are often linked to a person's childhood experiences. Child development theories posit that environmental factors present during the formative years with specific reference to interactions with the primary caregiver, are responsible for the formation of the adult’s cognitions, affect and behaviour. A baby looks at the mother (where she is the primary caregiver) to meet his primal needs and as such the relationship between mother and child is of the utmost importance (Shelton et al (2015: 22).

John Bowlby (1951) developed his attachment theory after realising that this bonding between mother and child not only allowed for the child’s survival but also determined the extent to which that child will one day successfully individuate. Bowlby posited two categories of attachment styles, namely secure attachment and insecure attachment. The latter category was later subdivided into avoidant,

ambivalent and disorganised attachment styles, but for the purposes of this study it suffices to refer to secure or insecure attachment styles. A child with a secure attachment to his primary caregiver would most likely form secure attachments with other people later in life whereas the child with an insecure attachment could be at risk for behavioural problems, especially aggression, in adulthood (Papalia, Olds and Feldman, 2008: 225). Shelton et al (2015: 23) cite a study that found that 95% of a sample of male criminal offenders incarcerated in psychiatric hospitals were found to exhibit behaviour consistent with an insecure attachment style. According to Mugavin (2008) a woman's attachment experience would significantly contribute to her ability to assume the maternal role.

There are other child development theories that aim to explain how childhood experiences influences a person's interpersonal relationships. Piaget's (1972) cognitive developmental theory and Erikson's (1963) psychosocial development theory are two of these. Both these theories address how the successful completion of developmental stages during childhood impacts a child's "cognitions, identity, affect, and relational dynamics with others" in later life (Shelton et al, 2015: 22). When a child never successfully completed the stages of development (such as separation individuation), this can create maladaptive behaviour and destructive desires. Shelton et al (2015: 23) also cite a study done by Oberman and Meyer (2008) which found, after having interviewed filicidal mothers, that many of them have an unhealthy dependence on their mothers. This would seem to indicate that they have not successfully mediated the individuation phase of their development. Other studies have found that more than half of the filicidal mothers interviewed, were without mothers. Their mothers have either abandoned them, died, or were unavailable during their childhood due to substance abuse, neglect or mental illness (Shelton et al, 2015: 23). These filicidal mothers would inevitably not have had a secure attachment with their mothers which would impact on their relational dynamics in later life. These women would also not have successfully completed the stages of development and as such they might "struggle to fully engage in the caretaker role and may be unwilling to give up being the recipient of care" (Shelton et al, 2015: 24).

3.4.4 Feminist perspective

Mugavin (2008) and Thompson (2014) write that gender is a social construct that dictates how a woman's life will be led. As mentioned earlier, feminist psychologists argue that maternal filicide reflects women's dual role of oppressed and oppressor. A mother functioning in a patriarchal society will feel powerless and this could lead to her yielding power over her child, the only thing less powerful than herself. Maternal filicide could therefore be seen as the consequence of socialised gender roles (Ferree, 1990: 867; Davies 2008: 2; Mugavin 2008; Schwartz & Isser, 2007: 135). Feminist researchers argue that socialised expectations of motherhood could also be to blame when

a mother kills her offspring. Girls are socialised into believing that motherhood is natural and satisfying and when this is not the case, a mother could feel anxious, isolated and ashamed (Kruger, 2013). Feminist researchers on maternal filicide argue that the systemic marginalisation of women and the subsequent silencing of women's voices are contributing factors to desperate mothers' desperate acts (Mauthner 1990: 351).

3.4.5 Neurobiology Perspective

Biology and environment work together to form a human being. Biological researchers aim to explain how biological mechanisms such as the brain dictate behaviour. A person is born with biological structures and mechanisms in place, but the environment in which that person grows up determines how these will be developed (Sternberg, 2009: 71; Mugavin 2008). Exposure to trauma during the formative years causes structural and functional changes in the brain that effect how that person will respond to stress later in life. These changes occur in the hippocampus, "the part of the brain that tends to short-term memory and the encoding and retrieval of long-term memory and affect how an individual perceives and evaluates future events" (Athens in Mugavin, 2008).

Lieberman (in Mugavin, 2008) states:

> It has been found that both the establishment of synaptic connections between neurons and the programming of neurochemical responses are dependent on experience and that if a child's neurologic development is threatened by abuse, which includes excessive attachment disruption, significant negative effects on the developing brain may be long term.

The age at which the child experiences abuse and trauma as well as the length of time the trauma continues, greatly influences the extent to which the brain develops adaptive pathways enabling proper regulation of emotions. A child who has been subjected to chronic trauma may then develop a personality style characterised by "emotional constriction, explosive rage, psychological numbing of emotions, and identification with an aggressive perpetrator" (Mugavin, 2008).

3.5 Conclusion

Maternal filicide is a multi-dimensional phenomena. Women kill their children for and because of a number of reasons. Historically, neonaticide and infanticide occurred as a result of illegitimacy, sacrifice, eugenics, and gender preference. It seems that these explanations tend not to apply to the killing of an older child or to modern Western societies, though, and other explanations have been searched for by numerous researchers from the fields of psychiatry, psychology, neurobiology, sociology and feminism. The answers that can be found in any and all of these fields of knowledge,

point to the fact that maternal filicide is a complex, multifactorial phenomenon with its aetiology in biological as well as environmental factors.

It can therefore be said that mothers who kill their offspring do so not necessarily because they want to, but most probably because their biology and environment condemned them to lives of impaired functioning and constant distress. This means that we need to acknowledge that the filicidal mother is not only the perpetrator, but can also be a victim. This sentiment is reiterated by both Mugavin (2005) and Spinelli (2003). As Mugavin (2005: 69) notes: “Although the murder of a child elicits sorrow, fury, and revulsion, the perpetrator of the crime is also often a victim”. Similarly Spinelli (2003: xv) writes that the killing of a child by its own mother “elicits sorrow, anger, and horror. It is a crime. It demands retribution. That is the law. Yet the perpetrator of this act is often a victim too, and that recognition makes for a more paradoxical response”.

This chapter had as its aim to define maternal filicide and to review the dominant perspectives on why this crime occurs. The psychiatric, psychological and psychosocial factors that have been associated with maternal filicide will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter so as to make them recognisable when encountered in a dramatic text.

Chapter 4: Affective, cognitive and behavioural manifestations of conditions that might lead to maternal filicide

This chapter will firstly give an indication of which research paradigm will be followed in the analysis of the four selected dramatic texts and secondly attempt to put into concrete manifestations the different elements – or constructs – discussed in chapter three as present in most cases of researched maternal filicide. Researchers call this process operationalizing the constructs so as to be observable and measurable (Terre Blanche, Durheim, Painter, 2006: 188). In the context of this thesis, that would mean delineating the psychiatric and psychological, psychosocial, child development, neurobiological and feminist perspectives on maternal filicide as possible manifestations regarding affect, cognitions and behaviour.

4.1 Research paradigm

As stated in chapter one, principles from both the positivist (quantitative) and phenomenology (qualitative) paradigms will be used when analysing the dramatic texts. In quantitative analysis, coding involves applying a set of rules to the data to transform information from one form to another (Terre Blanche et al, 2006: 189). This would render the data ready for statistical analysis which would then allow the researcher to draw inferences. I will not, however, draw inferences based on a statistical analysis of the data – in this case the dramatic texts itself – as this study makes no claim to either reliability or external validity.

Regarding reliability, the final measuring instrument for this study would be myself. In accordance with a more phenomenologist paradigm, I argue that the researcher cannot be excluded from this study. I acknowledge the fact that many different discourses are at play in how I read and interpret the texts. This would include my own, which could oscillate between actor discourse, mother discourse and psychology student discourse, to name but a few. My analysis of the dramas would not, however, be a discourse analysis. I will not try to establish which discourse(s) frame which texts. I will use the discourses already established in chapter three as my parameters, i.e. clinical discourse, feminist discourse and social discourse.

The four texts I am discussing in chapters five to eight are the only texts I will be analysing. No sample of texts with the theme of maternal filicide was drawn. I consciously decided on these four texts because of the varied geographical locations in which the plays are set. These texts are *Aalst* (Mclean, 2007 - Belgium), My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies (Meiring, 2011- South Africa), *And all the children cried* (Jones and Campbell, 2002 - Britain) and *By the Bog of Cats* (Carr, 1999 - Ireland). As such this study will have no external validity. With regard to recommendations made by

me as a result of my research, I might, depending on my findings after analysing the texts, find that authors need to do more research prior to addressing certain issues.

In qualitative analysis the data or material is coded as part of developing themes (Terre Blanche et al, 2006: 324), although the themes that will be searched for in the analysis of the four texts have *already* been delineated. These themes, or categories rather, are the empirically proven factors that could lead to a mother killing her child/ren. These categories will be subdivided into smaller sections and eventually into observable, operationalized units of analysis. This aspect of this study therefore tends toward a positivist philosophy of research.

As a philosophy, positivism adheres to the view that only "factual" knowledge gained through observation (the senses), including measurement, is trustworthy. In positivism studies the role of the researcher is limited to data collection and interpretation through an objective approach and the research findings are usually observable and quantifiable (Terre Blanche et al, 2006: 132). According to Collins (2010: 38) positivism "has an atomistic, ontological view of the world as comprising discrete, observable elements and events that interact in an observable, determined and regular manner". I argue that, even though a construct like poverty can be operationalized as, for instance, being dependant on social grants, poverty is still a relative term. Social grants in countries like Britain and Australia are considerably more than in a country like South Africa, for instance, and free health care and education, not to mention basic services like running water and electricity, provide a certain level of living that is not attainable to everyone in all countries. Yet the character in the play might experience her reality as that of being deprived. In other words, a societal relativism might be at play. The perception of poverty or economic hardship might also be a consequence of mental illness where the character is so far removed from her reality as to render all concrete observations interpretive. One could argue then that this would be empirical evidence of, for example, narcissistic personality disorder (where delusions of grandeur are sometimes evident) but again, a sense of entitlement on its own is not empirical evidence of a personality disorder or even sociopathic tendencies, even though these diagnoses might be present in both.

A reader might be forgiven for asking, at this point, what then the purpose of this research is! I reiterate what almost all research on maternal filicide has found and that is the complex multi-factorial nature of this phenomena. I will be looking for not one or two, but multiple markers in the dramatic texts to ascertain whether the fictional mother would, in all likelihood, also have killed her child if the fictional had been the non-fictional.

4.2 Making the theoretical observable

The following section will delineate observable cognitions, affect and behaviour as manifested by individuals suffering from certain mental illnesses in an attempt to make them recognisable in a character written for stage. The dominant fields of research regarding maternal filicide, as discussed in chapter three, will be used as a guideline. I will first look at the findings regarding maternal filicide from the psychiatric and psychological perspectives and put these into behaviour, affect and cognitions as they may manifest in an individual suffering from one or more of these conditions. The manifestations of clinical conditions would be most visible when viewed from the character, conflict and background components of formalist text analysis as discussed in chapter two. I will then attempt to put the psychosocial, feminist, neurobiological, and child development factors that could contribute to a mother killing her child, into more concrete terms, thus making it more recognisable when searching for them in a dramatic text. These factors should be visible in the given circumstances and background of a play.

4.2.1 Classification systems

As discussed in chapter three, classification systems of maternal filicide have evolved as more research on the topic was done over the past few decades, but most of them use motive for the murder as a classifying criteria. Resnick (in Shelton et al, 2015: 38) posits five categories, namely, altruism, acute psychosis, unwanted child, accidental, and spousal revenge. Scott (in Shelton et al, 2015: 38) proposes a classification system based on the source of the impulse to kill and d'Orban (in Shelton et al, 2015: 38) developed a classification system based on the type of women who killed their offspring. As mentioned in chapter three, all these systems basically correspond with one another in that they might have fewer or more categories of which the angles might vary, but the researched maternal filicide population is accounted for in them all. For the purposes of brevity, I will use Resnick's classification system for the rest of this discussion.

As this study will not attempt to contribute to preventative measures regarding maternal filicide, I will not focus my text analysis on the motives of mothers who kill, but rather on what a filicidal mother “looks like” affectively, cognitively and behaviourally within a certain environment so as to make her recognisable in a dramatic text. As such there are some of Resnick’s categories that are either not relevant to this study, or that will be discussed from other perspectives which put the focus on visible symptomology rather than motive. Resnick’s first category, altruistic filicide, does warrant a discussion though, as this phenomenon might not be accounted for in the perspectives mentioned.

The first category Resnick posits, is altruism. The act of killing one's child/ren to relieve them of a

real or perceived or imagined suffering (Shelton et al, 2015: 38). For a mother to kill her offspring to relieve real suffering, two things need to be true: the suffering needs to be severe and the mother needs to care enough for the child to risk being charged with a crime and all that entails (being prosecuted, jailed or institutionalized, losing custody of remaining children, notoriety, to name but a few). The severe suffering of a child can assume many forms, but physical suffering seems to be the most common motive in altruistic maternal filicide. To detect this in a text should not pose a problem if it is explicitly stated by any of the characters or implied in the characters' behaviour (putting an oxygen mask on a child who cannot breathe normally, for instance). Physical suffering could be due to illness, a birth defect, an accident, or even self-inflicted. I am thinking here of the son of Ellen Pakkies in My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies (Meiring, 2011) who was addicted to tik, a form of the drug methamphetamine. One could argue that his addiction could lead to physical suffering, either when in withdrawal from the drug or because of the physical deterioration due to continued drug use. Severe emotional suffering in a child could be due to mental illness, abuse, neglect and cognition of physical disablement. This type of severe suffering could be explicitly stated by the playwright as information given by the characters, or implicitly by the child's and other characters' behaviour. If, for example, a child is suffering because of abuse, one could argue that if the abuser were the mother and the abuse leads to filicide, the motive would not have been altruistic. If the abuser is someone else though and the mother feels powerless to put an end to it and sees the severe suffering it causes her child, she might then commit filicide in an attempt to save the child from further suffering. Abuse could be sexual, physical or emotional. In a text, this would manifest explicitly in actions and language or implicitly in characters' behaviour.

When a mother commits altruistic filicide because of real suffering of her child, she needs to care very deeply about the child. This caring would be based on maternal love which would manifest in language and actions towards the child and high levels of personal distress because of the child's suffering. This distress could lead to depression, the manifestations of which will be discussed later in this chapter along with the other mental illnesses associated with maternal filicide. I would argue that maternal filicide based on an altruistic motive for either real or imagined suffering, occurs because of mental illness. In one instance the illness causes the mother to imagine severe suffering and in the other the severe suffering leads to mental illness.

Resnick's second category, acute psychosis, will be discussed later in the chapter along with the other mental illnesses associated with maternal filicide.

Resnick's third category, unwanted child, is usually associated with neonaticide and infanticide, neither of which is relevant to this paper.

Resnick's fourth category is accidental death. The mother does not decide to kill her child. The death is a result of fatal child abuse. Research shows that psychosocial factors are usually to blame when a child dies from fatal abuse: parental childhood trauma, substance abuse, poverty, poor education, isolation, marginalisation and a history of previous criminality by the parent/s (Mugavin, 2008). These and other psychosocial factors and how they may be presented in a text, will be discussed later in this chapter. Research from a feminist perspective posits that all these factors can essentially be blamed on the patriarchal society in which mothers are asked to first become women and then mothers. I will return to this perspective later in this chapter.

Resnick's last category is spousal revenge: when a mother kills her child/ren to punish her partner. In literature, Medea would be the most famous character to have committed this crime. For a mother to kill her offspring as an act of revenge, many psychosocial factors conducive to maternal filicide need to be present. If not, I argue that mental illness will be detected. Both of these will be discussed under their separate headings.

4.2.2 Psychiatric and psychological perspectives

In chapter three, Axis I psychiatric conditions associated with maternal filicide were identified as unipolar depression, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. Axis II conditions were the following three personality disorders: borderline personality disorder, narcissistic personality disorder and antisocial personality disorder.

Unipolar depression

Unipolar depression goes by many names, such as clinical depression, biological depression, and major depression. All of these names refer to the same thing: feeling sad and depressed for an extended period of time for no apparent reason (Sue, Sue & Sue, 2010: 304). The following are manifestations of symptomology which could be an indication that a character suffers from depression:

- a general diminished interest in everyday chores or activities

- appetite or weight changes without intent

- insomnia (not being able to fall or stay asleep) or hypersomnia (sleeping too much) often

- loss of sex drive

- low energy nearly every day which could lead to neglect of personal appearance

- feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt nearly every day

- diminished ability to think or concentrate, indecisiveness and faulty or negative thinking

- recurrent thoughts of death, suicide ideation with or without a specific plan or previous attempts at suicide

- sad mood most of the day which could lead to crying spells (Bressert, 2016).

These symptoms need to have been present for more than two weeks for a formal diagnoses (Sue et al, 2010: 307) so any references in the text to extent of time of symptomology must be searched for:

Schizophrenia

For schizophrenia to be diagnosed, two or more of the following symptoms need to be present for at least a month and not due to substances like drugs or alcohol (Sue et al, 2010: 360). The following are manifestations of symptomology if a character suffers from schizophrenia:

- flat or inappropriate affect

- poor speech, such as short or empty replies

- inability to start or persevere in goal-directed activities

- preoccupation with delusions which would manifest as certain beliefs or thoughts which are in contradiction with reality

- hallucinations manifesting as sensory experiences that are not real. Seeing, hearing or smelling things that are non-existent

- grossly disorganized thinking which could manifest in speech or behaviour

- emotional or physical agitation (Bressert, 2016; Sue et al, 2010: 368).

Bipolar disorder

Bipolar disorder**,** sometimes called manic depression, is a mood disorder that is characterized by severe and powerful mood swings. A person with this condition experiences alternating episodes of mania and depression. Manic and depressive episodes can be short (hours to a few days) or the cycles can be much longer (weeks or even months) (Bressert, 2016). For the purposes of this study no distinction will be made between bipolar I disorder and bipolar II disorder as the difference between

them is diagnostic. The difference in symptoms of a manic episode and a hypomanic episode is one of functioning (Sue et al, 2010: 327).

The following are specific symptoms of a manic episode which, in conjunction with a depressed episode, could mean that a character is suffering from bipolar disorder:

- inflated self-esteem or grandiosity

- decreased need for sleep

- more talkative than usual and speech might be difficult to understand

- flighty, racy or pressured thoughts

- inability to concentrate for extended periods

- overactive in goal-directed activities (at work, socially or sexually) or psychomotor agitation

- excessive interest in pleasurable activities and poor judgement (Bressert, 2016; Sue et al, 2010: 306).

Personality disorders

An individual with a personality disorder has an array of maladaptive personality traits that deviates from the norm of that individual's culture. These lead to an enduring pattern of cognitions, affect and behaviour which is rigid and pervasive across a wide range of personal and social situations. It typically causes significant subjective distress and/or impaired functioning. The pattern is stable and long-standing with onset usually in early adulthood or adolescence (Bressert, 2016).

Borderline Personality Disorder

Bressert (2016) describes the main feature of borderline personality disorder (BPD) as "a pervasive pattern of instability in interpersonal relationships, self-image and emotions". Individuals with BPD have abandonment fears which are related to an inability to be alone and a need to be surrounded with people. Other people may experience someone with BPD as being emotionally shallow (Bressert, 2016). The following are manifestations of symptomology which could be an indication that a character suffers from BPD:

- a pattern of unstable and intense interpersonal relationships oscillating between hostility and ideation

- faulty or unstable self-image or sense of self

- impulsive behaviour that could be dangerous to others or self-destructive

- recurring suicidal behaviour or threats, or self-mutilating behaviour

- emotional instability due to powerful mood reactivity

- constant feelings of loneliness and emptiness

- inappropriate, excessive rage or difficulty controlling anger (Bressert, 2016; Sue et al, 2010: 214).

Narcissistic Personality Disorder

Bressert (2016) states that people with narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) "often believe they are of primary importance in everybody's life or to anyone they meet". The following are further manifestations of symptomology which could be an indication that a character suffers from NPD:

- obsessed with fantasies of power, success or influence

- exaggerated sense of self-importance also with regard to actual achievements and talents

- requires constant admiration and attention

- has an unreasonable sense of entitlement

- exploitative nature

- lack of empathy

- concerned with other people's opinions of him/her

- regularly displays arrogant, disdainful and competitive behaviours or attitudes (Sue et al, 2010: 216).

Antisocial personality disorder

According to Bressert (2016),

> Antisocial personality disorder is a disorder that is characterized by a long-standing pattern of disregard for other people's rights, often crossing the line and violating those rights. A person with antisocial personality disorder (APD) often feels little or no empathy toward other people, and doesn't see the problem in bending or breaking the law for their own needs or

wants.

They may have an inflated and grandiose sense of self which could manifest as a reluctance to do "ordinary" work (household chores as well as paid work) and may be excessively opinionated and arrogant. They may be perceived as being superficially charming and glib. Those suffering from APD may also be irresponsible and promiscuous in their sexual relationships and a pattern of short-term relationships may manifest (Sue et al, 2010: 210). Although most clinicians no longer diagnose people with APD as psychopaths or sociopaths, the general public still seem to use these terms freely. The following would be manifestations of symptomology if a character suffers from APD:

- shallow affect

- failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawfulness with a possible history of juvenile delinquency (this could mean a history of arrests)

- deceitfulness and conning or manipulating others, which could manifest as pathological lying

- impulsivity and a tendency towards unrealistic future goals

- irritability, aggressiveness and poor self-control

- reckless disregard for safety of self or others, possibly manifesting in promiscuity

- consistent irresponsibility and failure to take responsibility for own actions or circumstances

- lack of remorse or empathy, as indicated by being indifferent and callous towards those they might harm

- parasitic lifestyle (Putkonen, Weizmann-Henelius, Lindberg, Eronen, Häkkänen, 2009).

4.2.3 Psychosocial perspectives

Research shows that maternal filicide is hugely attributable to psychosocial factors[6]. The environment in which a child grows up and the environment in which that child then has to function as an adult, are determining factors in whether that person will lead a functional life in society. As has become apparent in chapter three and earlier in this chapter, abuse and deprivation suffered as a child could lead to the formation of dysfunctional personality styles or even mental illness. In analysing the texts, I will be looking for indicators of such abuse. This includes active abuse as well as passive abuse in

[6] See the discussion on this in Chapter 3, section 3.4.2.

the form of neglect. These acts might be interpreted as intentional forms of abuse. I argue that unintentional forms of abuse must also be searched for. These might include, for example, a child growing up in healthcare systems because of not having any parents. Even though the institutions might not intend for it to be so, economic and emotional deprivation will inevitably be part of this child's formative years even though no-one specifically wished it so. Sociologists and feminist writers might argue that intent can still be found in the lack of political will to change the reality of the underprivileged of which women and children form a big constituent.

Many researched cases of maternal filicide documents numerous attempts by the mother to seek help from societal structures prior to her filicidal act (Mugavin, 2008). These could include social welfare in the form of financial and housing assistance, healthcare assistance with mental or physical illness, restraining orders against abusive partners to name but a few. Numerous attempts to seek help can attest to the notion that society let these mothers and subsequently their children, down. Also noted were the amount of times filicidal mothers were arrested or reprimanded for deviant behaviour prior to the murdering of their child/ren. If the filicidal mothers in the texts have attempted to get assistance from government, independent or religious institutions, it might be stated explicitly. Seeing as many plays with maternal filicide as theme are an indictment of society's uncaring attitude towards the marginalised, I suspect that evidence of this perceived callousness will be plentiful.

Another factor often associated with researched maternal filicide, is the social isolation of the mother and child (Mugavin, 2005: 71). This could be intentional marginalisation by society because of unsavoury characteristics and behaviour of the mother (substance abuse, unemployment seen as laziness, abusive language and behaviour towards others, general flouting of societal norms), prejudice concerning ethnicity or sickness (HIV/AIDS for instance) or unintentional isolation due to no support system. Unintentional isolation can also occur because of ethnicity or illness, or even just because of a perceived “otherness” or sense of worthlessness by the mother. A mother and child who is not part of a broader family could also become isolated if she is the only caregiver. In a text, it should be apparent whether a character functions in a broader community or not. Whether the instigator of the isolation was the community or the mother will not really be relevant if the consequence was filicide.

Research has shown that most filicidal mothers have limited education (Shelton et al, 2015: 2). In a text this could translate as using language that is poor in vocabulary, an inability to read or write, wrong syntax and a limited field of reference. Another indication of limited education could be the choice (or non-choice) of employment. People with limited education are usually not employed in higher status jobs or sometimes not at all. This would result in economic hardship which would put

enormous strain on a caregiver. In modern society where consumerism is the norm, this would supposedly be apparent in a text. Characters would possibly refer to what cannot be had as a result of poverty. If they have become inured to poverty and do not vocalise it, I could infer it from living conditions (if stated).

As can be seen in almost all research on crime across all disciplines, violence begets violence, and the abused in many cases becomes the abuser. If a character is seen to be in an abusive relationship, I can deduct from this that she mirrors the research on maternal filicide that points to the vast number of women who killed their children while being physically abused themselves (Shelton et al, 2015: 2). Feminist writers would posit that this, in part, is because a powerless woman will exert power over the only thing less powerful than herself and that is her offspring (Schwartz and Isser, 2007: 134). If a mother's partner is abusive towards her, it could follow that he/she is also not supportive of her. If the mother is also isolated (as often happens in instances of inter relational abuse), the strain of raising children on her own could lead to desperation and an inability to "cope" which could lead to filicide. Abuse also affects perception of the self and the perception of being a bad mother could be enough for a mother to decide to commit filicide.

Another important contributor to the occurrence of child homicide, is substance abuse (Mugavin, 2008). The mother could be abusing alcohol, illegal drugs, and/or prescription drugs. It could be viewed as a delinquent act or a desperate act. In the case of the latter, the mother might simply be self-medicating to alleviate the stress she is under. The results within this context could remain the same: either a neglected child, or an abused child. Most researched cases of accidental maternal filicide noted a history of substance abuse in the mother. Indications of substance abuse in a text could be overt. If not, I will look for indications that the character is in an altered state. This could manifest in impaired speech, aggressive behaviour, slow reactions, and in the case of hallucinogenics, even hallucinations. Another indicator of substance abuse is irregular sleeping patterns. These manifestations could off course also be due to mental illness.

4.2.4 Child development theories

As mentioned earlier, the development of mental disorders and specifically personality disorders, are often relational to a person's childhood development. In this section I will not be exploring the consequences (possible mental illness) of poor childhood development as these were already discussed in chapter three and the manifestations delineated earlier in this chapter. Rather, I will supply indicators which, if found in the text, could mean that the character suffers from a developmental deficit which would inform her cognitions, affect and relationships with other people.

The following are inferences made from the child development theories discussed in chapter three and as such no specific references will be supplied.

When a child has an insecure attachment to her primary caregiver, this could lead to a belief that her world is not secure and safe and that she is not protected. Most children adapt to their environment and thus the formation of specific personality styles which in some instances can become personality disorders. Personality disorders aside, a child who had an insecure attachment to her primary caregiver could, as a result of this vulnerability, adopt a controlling personality style. This could manifest in not allowing other characters to make decisions regarding almost anything for fear of losing control. The perception that her safety and security is in her own hands has crystallised in adulthood as a feeling of always knowing best. Another way in which an insecure attachment to a primary caregiver could manifest in adulthood, is detachment. “Learning” that her environment is not safe and secure and that her emotional and instinctive needs will not be met by the person supposedly responsible for this, could lead the child to become an adult who, for fear of being hurt again, will not allow any emotionally intimate relationships into her life. In a text, i.e. as behaviour or actions, this could manifest as an aloofness or coldness. The apparent lack of empathy should not however, be confused with that of a person displaying anti-social behaviour as the source of the behaviour is fear, not a feeling of superiority.

Another developmental deficit a child might have experienced, is that of not having successfully mediated the stages of development such as separation individuation. This could happen when the primary caregiver, usually the mother, adopts a co-dependant parenting style in which the child is made to feel responsible for the mother's happiness and prosperity. This could manifest in the mother expecting the child to always put her needs first in all aspects of life. The separate “roles” of mother and child “blurs” and the burden of responsibility, unknowingly, becomes too great for the child. This could result in an overly dependent personality style in adulthood or the opposite, a controlling personality style, the manifestations of which were discussed earlier. A character with an overly dependent personality might display anxiety when asked to make any decisions, have an inverse relationship with her own child (mother becomes child and vice versa) and use other adults as caregiver substitutes. Adjectives that might describe this type of character could be irresponsible, childish, or even ditsy. To determine whether the filicidal character has had to deal with this developmental deficit, I would look for the above mentioned markers as well as the pronounced proximity (physical or otherwise) of the character's primary caregiver.

The other extreme, being motherless, either because of physical absence or because the mother was absent due to substance abuse, mental health problems and neglect/abuse, would also lead to

developmental deficits if no other primary caregiver was present with which to form a secure attachment. In a dramatic text, there might be explicit information regarding the absence of the filicidal mother's mother. If not, inferences could also be made. If, for instance, it is explicitly stated that a filicidal mother's primary caregiver was often drunk or high, a reader can conclude from this that the mother was also absent, if not physically, then definitely emotionally. The absence of a mother during childhood might result in personality disorders or personality styles. These styles, although not apparently affecting normal functioning, can be just as enduring and pervasive and could manifest on either side of the spectrum, i.e. controlling and all-consuming, or detached and uninvolved with her environment.

4.2.5 Feminist perspective

Most feminists agree that gender is a social construct. Gender roles are thus learnt rather than established by biology, and the place where we are socialised into these gender roles and patterns of behaviour is the family: “The proof for this theory is found in the sometimes radically different behaviour we see between women from different societies i.e. different societies construct being ‘women’ in different ways” (Thompson, 2014). Feminists have been dominant in criticising the way girls are socialised to accept inferior roles within the traditional nuclear family, whilst boys are made to believe they are superior. Girls are still taught that women get children and are responsible for the household chores whether they have other employment or not. Some feminists attribute the high divorce rate in Western countries as one of the consequences of gender socialisation in that, “although women are brought up to believe that this is how things should be, they feel resentful” (Thompson, 2014).

The world we live in has been constructed almost entirely by men and yet arguably some of the most prolific research on intra-family violence and single-parent families comes from the feminist perspective. Feminists agree that male dominance within the nuclear family is part of a bigger structure of male power, that it is neither innate nor unavoidable, and that it happens to women's detriment. It seems strange then that most conventional research on families “treat them as more or less closed units that can be understood in isolation from other social institutions, such as politics and the economy” (Ferree, 1990: 866). Feminist psychology role theory posits that people will do to others what was done to them. This would mean that mothers are socialising their daughters to subordinate behaviours as a result of their own socialising to these same behaviours (Ferree, 1990: 867). Oppression becomes generational.

Mauthner (1990: 351) writes that “research on depression has taken place almost exclusively within

medical and clinical settings, and has been dominated by a medical paradigm, in which the feelings and emotions of women who suffer with depression are pathologised as ill." Feminist writers criticise the classification of depression as a mental disease because it "creates a false dichotomy between a normal state of mental health, and a supposedly pathological one, premised on the assumption that normal motherhood is by definition a happy and depression-free experience" (Mauthner, 1990: 351).

Although the feminist perspective address the systemic neglect and marginalisation of women and how that could lead to maternal filicide, their arguments are causative more than manifestational. For the purposes of text analysis the aetiology of, for instance, major or bipolar depression, is not relevant. It is the presence thereof and how it manifests, that is relevant. That being said, the following would be markers that the characters in the text are operating within an oppressive patriarchy:

- use of language

- gender specific socialisation within the family from both the mother and father

- legal, economic structures within which the character functions

- level of education

- to what extent a female character is allowed to be heard about her experiences and needs

- to what level a woman's stress is pathologised and possibly medicated

- separation or divorce or the wish to do so

- powerless (explicitly and perceived) within their situations.

4.2.6 Neurobiology perspective

As with the feminist perspective, the neurobiology perspective posits a possible aetiology of maternal filicide. Research points to the formation of structural and functional neurologic changes in a child's brain when exposed to trauma in the formative years which could impact on behaviour in later years (Mugavin, 2008). This might explain, in part, the formation of especially personality disorders, the symptomology of which have already been discussed. If a personality disorder did not form, childhood trauma might still lead to the formation of a personality style based on emotional restriction, explosive rage, psychological numbing of emotions and identification with an aggressive perpetrator (Mugavin, 2008). These would manifest in a character's speech and behaviour towards other characters. Assuming that a character's biology was "intact" and "normal" at birth, I will look

for signs of high levels of childhood trauma and stress (usually abuse) in the texts that are analysed to ascertain whether neurologic changes might explain, in part, the filicidal act of the adult mother. These signs could include physical, sexual or emotional abuse by either the primary caregiver or any other character who was in close proximity to the child during the formative years. These might be explicitly stated by the filicidal character or other characters. As research shows that the structural changes caused by childhood trauma occurs in the hippocampus (the section of the brain responsible for the formation and retrieval of short and long-term memories), a reader must be careful though, to take the filicidal character at her word as the memories might be distorted.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter had as its aim to explain to the reader the need to use principles from both the positivist and phenomenologist paradigm during the course of this research. It also aimed at making observable the different factors that could lead to maternal filicide so as to make them recognisable when encountered in a dramatic text. The constructs that were operationalised came from the psychiatric and psychological, psychosocial, child development, neurobiological and feminist fields of research. Resnick's category of altruistic filicide necessitated further discussion as this category accounts for a large number of maternal filicides (Mugavin, 2008) and some aspects associated with this phenomenon are not accounted for in the other fields discussed. The cognitions, affect and behaviour which point to clinical conditions possibly being present in a character, should be found in the character and background components of formalist text analysis as discussed in chapter two. Environmental conditions conducive to maternal filicide will most likely be found in the background story and given circumstances of a text.

Maternal filicide is a multi-factorial phenomena. It does not take "only one" reason for a mother to kill her child. There are many fields of research trying to explain this "unthinkable" crime and, as can be seen from chapters three and four, the fields overlap. For the purposes of this paper I do not align myself with any single research field. As stated earlier, the purpose of this research is to ascertain whether there exists in a dramatic text with a filicidal mother, enough empirical evidence to suggest that this homicidal act is believable. This would mean that a multiple number of contributing factors would have to present themselves as manifestations in the texts that will be analysed.

Chapter 5: *Aalst*

5.1 Introduction

The Flemish play *Aalst* written by Pol Heyvaert and Dimitri Verhulst in 2005, is based on actual events that took place in the town of Aalst in Belgium. It can therefore be considered fact-based theatre. In January 1999 Luc de Winne and Maggie Strobbe checked into a hotel room with their two children, a boy aged seven and an infant girl of three months. The girl was suffocated with a pillow and the boy was murdered with a pair of scissors. The parents were subsequently arrested, tried and sentenced to life imprisonment. The case caused a sensation in Belgium and received a lot of media coverage. The play was first performed in 2005 by the Ghent-based theatre company, Victoria, under the direction of Heyvaert, after which it toured extensively in Europe, Australia and Canada (Aalst, n.d.). I will be using the English translation of the play for my analysis, which was done by Duncan McLean in 2007. In the interest of brevity, I will omit to reference McLean for the remainder of this chapter and the reader must conclude that all mentions of *Aalst* and all page numbers refer to McLean's 2007 translation.

In an article in the Australian newspaper *The Courier Mail* (2008), Heyvaert is cited as saying that sixty percent of the dialogue of the play comes directly from the trial with "some additional material" having been added by him and Verhulst. This could further delineate the genre by placing the play within the realm of tribunal theatre (as a form of fact-based theatre). In her award-winning article, "Aalst: Acts of Evil, Ambivalence and Responsibility"[7], Grehan (2010: 4) also mentions that "the performance draws principally on trial transcripts, documentary footage and a **small amount** of created text to tell the story of the brutal murder of a three-month-old baby girl and a seven-year-old boy (Ellie and Matthew), by their parents" (my emphasis). The reason for the inclusion of "some fiction", according to Heyvaert (in Hallett, 2008), "was to add perspective and it allows you to ask questions that weren't in the trial". In light of the use of primary sources (assumedly based on hard facts) as basis for the creation of the text, one can possibly expect that the proven factors that might lead to filicide will therefore be present in the text.

However, Grehan mentions that Maggie Strobbe's lawyer, Van den Eynde, asked the Belgian court to order the production to close down even before premièring. She cites Wouter Hilliaert who wrote in De Morgen (2005): "As far as Van den Eynde is concerned the problem is not with the actual performance, but with the fact that it is neither an objective rendition of the story nor total

[7] Helena Grehan (Murdoch University) won the Marlis Thiersch Prize in 2011 for research excellence in English-language articles in the broad field of drama, theatre and performance studies with this article.

fictionalization" (Grehan, 2010: 15). I agree with this sentiment and argue that forty percent of created text – as opposed to the claimed sixty percent of verbatim dialogue – is not a "small amount" (as posited by Grehan) and that no claim that the play, *Aalst*, is a true story can therefore be entertained. Even though the play is based on actual events, the text still represents the writers' interpretation and/or perspective of these events. I cannot therefore simply assume that, because this is a "real story", the proven factors that might lead to filicide are indeed present in this text. I also have no way of knowing which sixty percent of the text is verbatim and which forty percent is not. The authors have also given the parents fictional names. As such, I will treat *Aalst* as fictional and do my analysis accordingly. Before commencing with the analysis I will provide a brief synopsis of the play.

5.2 Synopsis

Aalst tells the story of two parents (Michael and Cathy Delaney) who murdered their children (Matthew and Ellie). The general locale of the play is Belgium (indicated by the title of the play) and the specific locale a courtroom. Apart from Michael and Cathy Delaney the only other character listed is a Voice (representative of the judge, but also perhaps the voice of the audience) who interrogates them, ostensibly to determine why these parents killed their children. The Voice is an "offstage character" and has no onstage presence apart from being heard. There is little to no indication of any action in the play and it primarily revolves around questions by the Voice directed alternatingly at Michael and Cathy and their respective responses. The story that unfolds is one of childhood trauma, social isolation, sexual, physical and emotional abuse, criminality, substance abuse, and neglect and abuse of their children leading to the murders in a hotel room in Aalst. Although not demarcated as such, there is a one page coda section at the end of the play (the stage directions say: *the lights dim*) where Michael and Cathy congratulate each other on their "performances" in "court" (page 47). The factors that led to the murders as well as the murders themselves lie in the past and as such the background story of this play is paramount to understanding these characters. The components usually associated with given circumstances (spirituality, beliefs, society, economics, politics and law) are also present in the background story although the onstage dialogue does also give an indication of these. The macro objectives of both Cathy and Michael seem to be to convince the Voice of their status as victims. Only during the coda do we hear that subterfuge was their method. As this research concern maternal filicide, I will focus my text analysis on the mother, Cathy, in relation to her environment (of which her partner, Michael is a component).

5.3 Analysis

As mentioned in chapter one, the different perspectives on maternal filicide overlap and as such I will

not categorise all the indicators found in the text as belonging to specific perspectives but will follow a more inclusive approach.

When considering the general locale of the play as a courtroom, it could be concluded that Michael and Cathy Delaney have been deemed fit to stand trial for their filicidal act, implying cognisance of their situation. This does not mean that mental disorders are not present, merely that, at the time of trial, they are mentally and intellectually stable enough to understand that they are on trial for murder.

Ten pages from the end of the play, the Voice informs the audience that the psychiatrist that testified at this trial (possibly at an earlier stage), found both parents to be fully accountable for their acts: “They have normal brains and their brains function normally” (page 38). According to the Voice the psychiatrist mentioned a sociopathic personality, but brushes aside any alleged paranoid or schizotypal traits as not material: “No serious psychiatric disorder can be found in the minds of these two. They are completely normal” (page 38). Yet, to me, *Aalst* reads like a textbook on antisocial personality disorder (APD) symptomology.

Some dialogue spoken by the Voice are in quotation marks, implying that these were the direct words of the psychiatrist. The psychiatrist stating that “no serious psychiatric disorder” could be found, could be seen as in agreement with what Kendell (2002) writes regarding most psychiatrists’ reluctance to regard personality disorders as mental illness. In the same article he writes that this contentious issue had lain dormant until

> the UK Government made it clear in 1999 that it intended to introduce legislation in England and Wales for the compulsory and potentially indefinite detention of people with what it called “dangerous severe personality disorder”, whether or not they had been convicted of a serious criminal offence. (Kendell, 2002)

However, the European Convention of Human Rights to which the UK subscribes forbids the detention of anyone who has not been found guilty in a court of law unless that person is of unsound mind. As Kendell (2002) points out, the Government will then have to argue that “the potentially dangerous people it wishes to incarcerate are ‘of unsound mind’, and this means maintaining that they have personality disorders, and that personality disorders are mental disorders.” Even though Kendell is referring to the UK Government, this legislation would have a worldwide impact on clinicians’ thinking regarding personality disorders. Kendell (2002) posits that one of the reasons for clinicians’ reluctance to define personality disorders as mental illnesses, is because they have no effective treatment. In the case of antisocial personality disorder, for instance, it seems “undoubtedly the case that, worldwide, the majority are ‘managed’ most of the time by the criminal justice system rather

than by health services" (Kendell, 2002).

Grehan (2010: 8) writes that

> If the parents were labelled insane, unstable or unfit (intellectually incompetent) – or if the performance revealed them to be so – then understanding or responding to their actions might have been easier. But they are not and the performance makes clear that they are perfectly competent to stand trial.

As Howes (2009) points out, "insanity is a concept discussed in court to help distinguish guilt from innocence. It's informed by mental health professionals but the term today is primarily legal, not psychological. There's no 'insane' diagnosis listed in the DSM".[8] Grehan fails to mention that there exists a distinction between the legal use of the term insanity and the psychological concept of mental illness and that to be legally sane does not equate to mental health. Spinelli (2003: 145) writes that "the MPC[9] provides that '[a] person is not responsible for criminal conduct if at the time of such conduct as a result of mental disease or defect he lacks substantial capacity either to appreciate the criminality [wrongfulness] of his conduct or to conform his conduct to the requirements of law'". If it could be proven that these criteria were met at the time of the crime, an insanity defence could be offered by the accused. Although this study does not concern itself with the legal proceedings surrounding maternal filicide, I feel it is important to point out that it could be argued that someone who is diagnosed as suffering from antisocial personality disorder, could in fact be made to fit the above criteria. Be that as it may, that both the fictional psychiatrist in the play and Grehan fail to acknowledge that both these parents suffer from a serious mental disorder (if one accepts that personality disorders are mental disorders) could be an indictment of society's inherent revulsion of filicidal acts.

This analysis will therefore delineate the observable manifestations of antisocial personality disorder (APD) as seen in the mother character, Cathy. As my research[10] has shown that personality disorders could form due to severe childhood trauma and consequent developmental deficits, I will start the text analysis by looking for information pertaining to these.

> VOICE: Cathy Delaney, you were placed in a children's home. By whom?

[8] Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders
[9] Model Penal Code that has been adopted by half of the states and most of the federal circuit courts of appeal in the USA.
[10] See Chapter 3.

> CATHY: I was placed in a children's home by my mother.
>
> VOICE: You were placed in a children's home by your mother. Why were you placed in a children's home by your mother?
>
> CATHY: I don't know why I was sent there. No one ever told me why, never.
>
> VOICE: It was never talked about. Because you said – and it touched me – in the investigation, you said you had been hidden away, in a children's home in the country. You thought they wanted rid of you. (page 5)

In the span of only a few lines, the fact that Cathy was sent to a children's home is mentioned five times and the fact that it was done by her mother, three times. This over-emphasis by the writers can be deemed as intentional. It is clearly established that Cathy was, for reasons unknown to her, abandoned by her mother. This would have been very traumatic for a child. On page six we read that she went to her father on weekends. He had started a relationship with someone else, the name of whom Cathy can't remember. This could indicate that this woman never became a nurturing figure in the child's life. In fact, Cathy says she was regularly given money by this woman to go stay elsewhere (page 6), pointing to yet another rejection by a (potential) caregiver. The mother who sent her away is also never mentioned again and one must assume that she was absent from the child's life. Consistent rejection would be traumatising to a child.

The Voice (page 6) asks Cathy if she had to perform sexual acts for her father to which she answers in the affirmative. If one adheres to the notion that Cathy suffers from APD, the fact that she never mentioned it to anyone could be indicative of this alleged sexual abuse possibly being untrue (pathological lying occurs frequently in people suffering from APD), but it is also a known fact that many molested children tend to keep the "secret". If indeed this abuse happened, it would further traumatise an already traumatised child.

On page five the Voice states that Cathy's father had four wives. It is not clear whether Cathy's mother was his first or second wife but the fact remains that she was abandoned by her biological mother and that at least two women entered the nuclear family after that. When asked if her father knew of the one woman's attempts to get rid of her, she answers that he thought it was just her running away. This could point to a history of juvenile delinquency which is a characteristic of people with APD. The father did not work and they seem to have survived on his disability grant. These factors all point to a chaotic environment where the child had little if any stability or consistency. There are thus indications of severe stress and trauma during Cathy's formative years which could have led to the

formation of a personality disorder. If one adopts the neurobiology perspective, childhood trauma could also lead to structural changes taking place in the brain which might lead to an enduring deviation from normal cognitions and behaviour. This would make the psychiatrist's statement about the couple having "normal brains" (page 38) inaccurate.

Much research has shown that victims of childhood sexual abuse often identify with the perpetrators of the abuse (Glasser, Kolvin, Campbell, Leitch, & Farrelly, 2001: 490). There is much evidence in *Aalst* of this phenomena. Even though her father abused her until she met Michael, she preserved a relational bond with him. She kept going home. She wrote him letters from jail. She replaced him with another abuser (Michael) whom she claims to simultaneously love and hate. She even goes so far as to blame her current situation only on Michael: "Today is that bastard's birthday. Things started going downhill for me the day he was born" (page 13), seemingly completely negating the effect her father's abuse would have had on her.

When Cathy tells the court what happened after her first failed attempt to kill her son, she acknowledges that she has become the perpetrator:

> Then when I got back to the room and sat down on the edge of the bed with my ciggy, I saw the boy looking at me. [ ] I also knew he wouldn't sleep any more that night, or at least, he'd try not to sleep: because he didn't trust me anymore. [ ] I was reminded of myself. My father always used to light a cigarette just after he had come inside me. [ ] I blew the smoke out just like him. (page 27)

This seeming dependency on abuse, her continued relationship with her father and having become an abuser herself, could be seen as indications of identification with the original childhood perpetrator.

Another indication that someone is suffering from APD, is a longstanding pattern of disregard for the norms and laws of the society within which they live. With regards to criminality, there are many references in *Aalst* that this couple thought themselves above the law. Seven years before the murders Cathy was caught stealing clothes and jewellery (page 43). Although this is the only reference to criminality of which Cathy was the single perpetrator, it becomes obvious that she partook in Michael's criminal activities, even justifying it when she says: "crime isn't something you do for fun, you know. Not unless, eh…not unless you're sick in the head" (page 45). Michael admits to being a bootlegger, driving an unregistered, uninsured car without having a driver's license, damaging property, using illegal substances, taking possession of items without paying for them, physically and sexually abusing Cathy and that he left the children's home he was raised in with a criminal record "as long as your arm" (page 28). On page 42 the Voice says: "You took a pair of scissors and a razor.

Why did you take a pair of scissors and a razor? They were after you. Who was after you? You took them for self-defence. What gang?" The Voice also asks them three times on page 43 why the door to their hotel room was barricaded. This could imply that not only debt collectors and Child Welfare might have been in pursuit of the couple, but also other, possibly criminal parties, cementing the picture of a life led on the wrong side of the law.

Some of the couple's activities might not necessarily have been unlawful but were nonetheless dismissive of society's accepted norms. Both parents refused to get gainful employment. Cathy says she tried but failed an aptitude test for a job as a general domestic. It is implied that she failed due to the filthy state their own home was in.

> CATHY: You lot're expecting me to scrub my whole house down, when you won't even give me a certificate to work as a cleaner! (page 15)

Even though Michael seemed to have made quite a bit of money with his bootlegging activities, they received social security benefits and also applied for emergency support. When welfare delivered food to them they didn't like, "we just left it there. It was good enough for the cats" (page 39). Cathy goes so far as to say that sometimes the meals were disgusting and that she would rather have eaten dirt (page 39). This parasitic behaviour is typical of someone suffering from APD. When a social worker told Cathy about the benefits of shopping at a thrift shop, she accuses the shop owners and cashiers of crookedness (page 40). She accuses her neighbour of jealousy for complaining about the volume at which the Delaneys played their music, the fact that they sometimes had two televisions on simultaneously throughout the night and seemed to be neglecting their baby who sometimes cried for hours on end (page 16). Cathy normalises Michael's abnormal habit of throwing appliances out the window by saying "from time to time he needs to throw something. It calms him down, makes him feel better" (page 17).

> CATHY: She's jealous, of course, of us having two or three TVs, so that we can smash the odd one and let off steam. Why doesn't she just buy herself a few more tellies, then she can smash one herself from time to time! (page 17)

The neighbour's inability to understand their logic is confounding to the couple, illustrating what could be considered as a warped idea of what is acceptable to society. The same warped logic applies when the neighbour is also accused of being too "stuck up" to apply for social security benefits even though she hates her job at the factory (page 18). When asked by the Voice why the couple, despite having had enough money, never paid their debts, Cathy replies "probably we didn't feel like it, I suppose" (page 10). The Voice makes many references to societal attempts to intervene in this

couple's life prior to the murder of their children:

> VOICE: You both rejected all the chances society gave you. When people offered you help, you wouldn't take it, you wouldn't take anything except for the money. (page 37)
>
> VOICE: Ah, what an attitude! What society offers isn't good enough for you then? (page 39)
>
> VOICE: You couldn't care less about other people, about society? (page 41)
>
> VOICE: Social parasites. Would you agree with that description?
>
> CATHY: Sure
>
> VOICE: Mr Delaney?
>
> MICHAEL: That's it.
>
> VOICE: So you want to be given everything, but you'll give nothing back, and you refuse to stick to the rules. The only rules you live by are your own. (page 41)

Cathy and Michael's parasitic lifestyle could be construed as borne from an entitled and superior sense of self, characteristic of someone suffering from APD. Their unwillingness to take any responsibility for their actions further corroborates this finding. That their children died, despite the seemingly numerous attempts at interventions, can be seen as indicative of the impotence of public health and law systems which correlates with the psychosocial perspective of filicide as being a multifactorial phenomenon with societal institutions arguably just as culpable as the murderers.

Although most of the references to poor self-control pertain to Michael, there are indications that Cathy exhibited similar behaviour especially towards her son, Matthew. It seems she physically and verbally abused him as a spontaneous reaction to her own abuse. Whereas Ellie (her daughter) was merely neglected, Matthew was neglected and actively abused. He was seldom fed and was never bought any toys, being told that "Santa Claus doesn't come for bad kids" (page 28). He was made to witness the sexual and physical abuse of his mother by his father.

> VOICE: Mrs Delaney, were you strict with Matthew?
>
> CATHY: Yes, I got angry with him a lot and I hit him quite often…because I was stressed by all the things Michael did to me.
>
> VOICE: So you were stressed by all the things Michael did to you, and your child, Matthew,

had to bear the brunt?

CATHY: Yes.

VOICE: So it's because you didn't have the courage to stop Mr Delaney that you made that little boy suffer. You smacked him for the slightest thing. The child was running around covered in bruises. Punching him in the face, pushing him down the stairs, taping his mouth shut. And when he was finicky with his food, making him eat with a ladle. That boy never had a life, did he, Mrs Delaney? (page 15)

The above passage can also be seen as an example of a powerless mother exerting power over the only thing less powerful than herself (as posited by feminist writers), namely her child. It must be stated that Cathy's loss of control prior to the family's journey to Aalst does not correlate with her behaviour in the hotel room. There are clear indications that the murder of at least Matthew was planned and prepared for.

The characteristic most commonly associated with APD, is the absence of empathy and lack of remorse for harm done to others. The couple's lack of empathy and remorse firstly seems clearly manifested in their disdainful behaviour towards society in general. Secondly, with regards to her family, Cathy does not ever give an indication that her neglect and abuse of her children prior to their murders was something she feels remorse for. In the re-telling of the fatal incidents in the hotel room, Michael states that he tried to suffocate Ellie but couldn't. He then asked Cathy to "finish it" after which "she took that pillow and put it over her, and she lay on top of it" (page 11). Cathy claims not to remember and when the Voice asks her why that could be, she assumes the role of victim: "He slapped me in the face, burnt me with cigarettes, with a razor he…carved my legs up. And as well, in my pubic hair, he wrote the letter M" (page 11).

When confronted with her wrongful acts she therefore shows no remorse toward or empathy with Matthew, but rather directs it at herself. When at first she does not succeed in killing Matthew, she tells the court that "his eyes were like a cow's. He looked at me like a cow going past in a truck" (page 27). This likening of her child she had just tried to suffocate to an animal on its way to be slaughtered, is a chilling example of what the Voice refers to as Cathy's "cool and calculating" behaviour (page 30). As has already been mentioned, the second and fatal attempt seems planned and prepared for. Cathy had decided to electrocute Matthew by dropping a live wire into the bath while she was bathing him. Although initially denying it, she admits that a wire was cut in preparation of this plan (page 31). It is never stated why this plan wasn't followed, merely that the next plan (stabbing the boy with scissors) seemed also to have been prepared for.

MICHAEL: I took a pair of scissors that were lying behind me.

VOICE: They were lying ready for you?

CATHY: On the bedside table.

VOICE: On the bedside table.

CATHY: Behind him.

VOICE: Behind him.

MICHAEL: On the bedside table.

VOICE: On the bedside table. But they were lying ready for you there? So you knew clearly at that moment what you were going to do to Matthew? You knew he had to die?

CATHY: Yes. (pages 31-32)

When Michael was stabbing Matthew in the back with the scissors the night before the boy's birthday, she was holding her hand over his mouth "to stop him screaming" (page 33). When the Voice asks if what they did to their children seems fair, she replies: "It's horrific" (page 12). Nothing more. There is no acknowledgement of the fact that it was them who inflicted the horror. The most compelling example of Cathy's lack of remorse lies in the last two pages of *Aalst*:

VOICE: You don't seem to show any remorse, do you, Mrs Delaney?

CATHY: Yes, I do. My heart is wide open for my children

VOICE: What do you mean by that?

CATHY: I don't know.

VOICE: Don't you think you should apologise?

CATHY: Who to?

VOICE: To the people you hurt.

CATHY: I've been hurt too! (page 46)

Five speeches on the lights dim for which is ostensibly the end of the play. Then the couple have a

short conversation wherein it becomes clear that they had been putting on a performance for the duration of the "trial" leaving the audience to feel that they have been misled throughout the play. I feel safe in speculating that this section could not have been a part of the original trial and that the manipulative nature of this section is rather a case of the writers manipulating the audience, than the characters manipulating the court. The origin and intent of this coda aside, as an actress I would still have to work with the given, which is the unmasking of a manipulative murderer who rehearses lines in order to sound contrite in an effort to get a reduced sentence. Which would be exactly what someone suffering from APD would do. This section of the play also throws a question mark on everything these characters have said so far. The audience cannot know now what was true and what wasn't.

There are also earlier signs of possible deceit. Cathy says "I don't know" eight times and "I can't remember" four times during the course of the play. At the time the audience hears these lines they might be indicative of disassociation due to severe trauma, but in the light of the coda, they get the more sinister quality of intended deceitfulness. There are also factual incongruities in the couple's story that supports this notion of deceit and manipulation. There seems to be confusion as to if Cathy did indeed want to commit suicide after the filicide. She denies this by saying "I never meant to kill myself" (page 34) and when the Voice asks her why she told the police otherwise, she answers that she lied to corroborate Michael's story. Two speeches later she says that she did in fact ask Michael to slit her wrists, but only after her own attempt failed. On page 35 the Voice asks the couple where they were during their attempted assisted suicides to which Michael states in the bathroom of the hotel room. On page 36, however, Cathy says that the leg of the dead boy was laying on her leg. Yet they had said that Matthew was killed in the bedroom and his body laid on the floor when they got up to go to the bathroom. Matthew's leg could thus not have been touching her leg. These inconsistencies could be due to memory loss due to trauma or time elapsed since the incidence, or they can be indicative of wilful deceit.

The last manifestation of APD that will be discussed is shallow affect. A person suffering from APD does not experience emotions as strongly or for the same length of time as other people do. Research has shown that the cognitions of appropriate emotional responses to stimuli are present but not the actual emotional and physiological response. Psychiatrists J. H. Johns and H.C. Quay (in Bryant, 2012) describe this phenomenon in people suffering from APD as "they know the words but not the music". In *Aalst* this would account for Cathy's apology on page 14 that seems rehearsed and empty of any real remorse: "I would like to say that I miss my children very much, and that I'm very sorry about everything that happened, and that I also wish I could turn the clock back". The fact that she makes this speech immediately after Michael stood for his apologetic speech, furthers the impression

of her apology being rehearsed and delivered on cue. As mentioned earlier, the coda section of the play reinforces the impression that every word the couple have said so far, could have been lies. In this section Cathy rehearses some options of things to say in order to make the court (and audience) believe that she is truly remorseful. This "trying on" of seemingly appropriate responses to damage done to others are completely in keeping with behaviour manifested by someone with APD. Then she settles on the exact same speech as delivered on page 14 with a small add-on: "because what we did was not exactly brilliant" (page 48). This reinforces my belief that the apology on page 14 was mechanical and devoid of any real remorse.

The one area where I have difficulty with my "diagnoses" of Cathy as someone suffering from APD, is in her proclaimed love for Michael. The Merriam-Webster dictionary (2016) defines love as "a feeling of strong or constant affection for a person". Research seems to indicate that people suffering from APD would not be able to have either a strong, or a constant feeling of affection for anyone. Yet she claims to love him (and he her) quite a number of times in the text. We are privy to letters they wrote one another from prison using rhyming pet names (My darling Coo and My darling Moo). Cathy writes in her letter to Michael:

> My darling Moo. [ ] Honey, I think of you all the time and wonder how you're doing there, hoping you're not in too much pain. I miss you so much, and especially now because you are so far away. My heart hurts terribly, it's just breaking for you. I wish we were together. I wish our whole wee family could be together again, because I miss all of you so much I can hardly bear it. It's just unbearable. [] (page 18)

The letter seems inundated with feeling and empathy. They even got married while in prison. One could argue that she knew the prison wardens would be reading her letters to Michael and that the letter is another example of displaying seemingly appropriate responses for the benefit of witnesses. In the coda section of the play, however, Michael uses the same pet name, Coo, when addressing Cathy. As the writers might want the audience to believe that what they are witnessing here are the "true" Cathy and Michael, it would follow that the couple would not here be pretending with each other for the sake of appearances. The longevity of their relationship is also of concern with regards to APD. Their son Matthew was seven when he was killed which would make their relationship at least seven and a bit years old. As mentioned earlier, people suffering from APD tend to have short-lived relationships.

The only explanation I have for this seeming anomaly is that the couple are in fact also role playing with one another and have been for a long time. Having both been abandoned as children and brought

up in homes, they could be aspiring, at least cognitively, towards a sense of belonging to a nuclear family and all that entails. This would explain Cathy's loyalty towards Michael even though she was being abused by him. On page 13 she has a brief outburst where she says she hates him and calls him a beast, a monster and a bastard. The Voice then asks her why she married him if she felt this way, to which she replies that she loves him. In keeping with people suffering from APD, her aggressive outburst was short-lived. To me, this read as the only "true" emotional display by Cathy in the whole play.

Some research has posited two subtypes of antisocial personality disorder, namely primary psychopathy and secondary psychopathy. People suffering from secondary psychopathy tend more towards negative emotions such as fear, anger, disgust, contempt and guilt and exhibit poor assertiveness.

> Primary psychopathy is underpinned by an inherited affective deficit, whereas secondary psychopathy reflects an acquired affective disturbance. Because the secondary psychopaths' hostile, callous behavior (sic) can be understood as an emotional adaptation to such factors as parental rejection and abuse, secondary psychopaths are viewed as more amenable to treatment than primary psychopaths. (Skeem, Kerr, Johansson, Andershed & Louden, 2007: 395)

Cathy's childhood abuse is clearly delineated in the text as is her reactive anger and aggression towards especially Matthew and sometimes Michael. If one interprets her loyalty to Michael not as a misguided attempt at "normalcy" but as a manifestation of fear and poor assertiveness, then it could be argued that Cathy falls into this second category of antisocial personality disorder.

Even though the environmental factors proven to be present in most cases of maternal filicide have been mentioned with regards to childhood trauma and criminality, I do want to point to specific psychosocial factors that warrant further mentioning in *Aalst*, namely substance abuse, level of education, social isolation, abusive relationship and poverty.

It is stated by Michael that the couple were often stoned when they picked up Matthew from school; on one occasion being so stoned that they nearly took the wrong boy home (page 28). On page 40 the Voice refers to their drinking sessions. Earlier the Voice asks Cathy if Michael forced her to swallow tablets to which she answers: "and drink beer" […] and he also made me order a bottle of champagne" (page 24). On page 14 Cathy refers to the medication she is on resulting in a phantom pregnancy. We never learn what medication or what tablets. The picture of substance abusers are clear though.

Research has shown that poor education is often associated with maternal filicide. There seems to be some discrepancies regarding Cathy's education. On page five it is established that Cathy's schooling was going downhill and that she was changing her courses "settling for something easier each time" (page 7). Her use of language also points to limited education. Yet the play opens with the Voice asking Cathy if she used to like crosswords as he/she was led to believe to which she answers in the affirmative. I am surrounded by highly educated people and still the only people I know who like crossword puzzles are the linguistically inclined with a natural curiosity. In the coda section of the play Michael says that Cathy's selection of phrases sound as if she's "reading from a proverb-a-day calendar" which is more in keeping with someone with limited education. I suspect that the crossword puzzle opening was the writers' fictional creation to introduce the metaphor they chose for this play: "VOICE: Well, what we're going to try and do here is solve the crossword puzzle of your life" (page 3).

The societal isolation of Cathy, both as a child and as an adult, is clearly delineated in the text. When she was abandoned by her mother "no-one ever told me why" (page 5). She was put in a children's home. She never discussed the sexual abuse she suffered at the hands of her father with anyone. After having met Michael the isolation seems to have been by choice. Interference in their lives were actively rejected. She says the neighbour thought she was a witch and was generally disapproving of them. The language through-out the play is that of isolation. Everything is related in terms of "us" (Cathy and Michael) and "them" (society). The filicidal act occurred in a barricaded hotel room. The Voice asks repeatedly why the door was barricaded and then posits that it was because "there was nothing to go out for" (page 43). The isolation has become all-encompassing and there was no going back.

Mothers who commit filicide are often in abusive relationships and there are ample indications of this in *Aalst*. It is stated that Michael hit Cathy for the first time after only knowing her for two weeks. He slapped her, cut her, humiliated her, raped her anally, burnt her with cigarettes and forced her to swallow tablets and drink beer.

Another proven contributor to maternal filicide is poverty. I have argued in chapter three that poverty is a rather subjective term in instances where this does not involve homelessness or starvation. This seems to be the case in *Aalst*. On page 9 it is established that the Delaneys had "two thousand two hundred and fifty" per month. The currency is not mentioned but one can assume it is Euro. The Voice clearly feels that this is not a small amount of money, yet the couple applied for emergency support. The couple make many more references to their "not having anything" apart from the things they ordered off catalogues and never paid for. The Delaneys clearly felt underprivileged. It seems

abundantly clear though that their perceived needs were manifestations of greed and entitlement and not any real hardship. Cathy admits that financial problems were “not the reason we did it, it wasn’t because of financial problems” (page 11).

5.4 Conclusion

Aalst asks of the performers to tell the story, as if in a court of law, of the brutal killing of two children. It aspires to psychological realism and as such it is imperative that the proven factors which could have led these parents to kill their children, be present. I feel this criteria have been met if I accept the possibility of Cathy as a person suffering from antisocial personality disorder of the secondary variable. She suffered severe childhood trauma, has a history of criminality, shows no remorse or empathy, has a sense of entitlement, exhibits shallow affect of short duration, shows poor impulse control and led a parasitic life. Psychosocial factors that were identified in the text not already mentioned, included substance abuse, a current abusive relationship, societal isolation and limited education.

Chapter 6: My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies

6.1 Introduction

My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies written by Lizz Meiring in 2011[11] is fact-based theatre in that it tells the story of an actual event that happened in South Africa in 2007. One could argue that it is also documentary theatre in that this particular filicide and ensuing light sentence marks a historical moment in the South African psyche regarding the plight of mothers on (specifically, but not exclusively) the Cape Flats. It merits mention that, unlike *Aalst* (McLean, 2007) which is also fact-based theatre but where the character names were different from the actual parents on whom the play was based, Meiring calls her characters by their real names. I deduce from this that Meiring wanted to tell this specific story about these specific people, thus humanising the 'murdering mother' and the 'addict monster' that were so widely reported on in the media.

This play originated as part of the Afrikaans festival circuit mentioned in chapter one and as such would have had limited resources and time. Theatre written for the Afrikaans festival circuit also often buckle under the strain of having to be palatable for a generally conservative audience. Most Afrikaans audiences (especially the older generations) do not tolerate nudity, obscene language or blasphemy. Meiring stayed true to the Kaaps vernacular (which often includes obscene language) and made the audience witness a son physically, verbally and possibly sexually assaulting his mother. In light of this, it is astounding that My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies reportedly holds the unofficial record of the longest running Afrikaans show ever (Meiring, 2016).

In a telephonic interview with the writer, Lizz Meiring, she told me that although she had contact with Ellen Pakkies, she never used Ellen as a source of information, preferring to do her own research (Meiring, 2016). What she also said was that she had taken six months to write a play that, on the Friday night before the Monday that they were due to start rehearsals, she erased from her hard-drive because she disliked it so much. As she was deleting the text, a friend who occasionally helps the police in her capacity as a psychic, telephoned Meiring. This friend calls herself an angel communicator and told Meiring that there was a man who wanted to make contact with her. Or rather, a boy in the body of a man. Meiring concluded that this was Abie Pakkies (Ellen's murdered son) and that the reason Meiring's friend saw him as a boy was because he had been fourteen when he started using tik which stunted any further growth of his soul. Meiring went on to tell me that the new text of My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies was written in one night. She describes that night's process as

[11] My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies has not been published and I have been asked by the author not to include the script as an addendum as certain negotiations regarding the script are currently underway and there might be legal repercussions if the script became public.

automatic writing with Abie providing information. Although there exists no "proof" of any of these things really happening except for the writer's say-so, one could argue that this claim by the author situates this play in the realm of verbatim theatre, albeit under unusual circumstances. I will leave it to the reader to decide where he/she stands in this matter. For the sake of brevity I will omit the name of the writer and the date that the play was written for the remainder of this chapter, as all mentions of My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies and all page numbers will refer to Meiring's text which was written in 2011. Background information I deem relevant to the play will be discussed next, followed by a synopsis, the analysis and finally my conclusions.

6.2 Background

On September 12, 2007, a middle aged, religious mother-of-three strangled her twenty year old son to death in Lavender Hill, Cape Town, South Africa. She then put on her nursing uniform and took a taxi to one of Cape Town's more affluent suburbs where she worked as the caretaker of an elderly person. A few hours later she told the domestic worker that she needs to be taken to the police station as she suspects that she had killed her son that morning. Ellen Pakkies was taken to the Steenberg Police Station where she admitted guilt to the killing of her drug addicted son, Adam Pakkies. She was remanded and later released on R1000 bail which some of the community members living in Lavender Hill, raised (Khumalo, 2010). Her case was tried at the Wynberg Regional Court where she was found guilty of murder. In a radical move away from the recommended minimum sentence of twenty five years imprisonment for what the state called "premeditated murder", Ellen Pakkies was given three years suspended sentence with a mandatory 280 hours community service (Majavu, 2008). Magistrate Amanda van Leeve was reported as saying the following to Ellen Pakkies during sentencing: "You were a victim. Imprisonment will not be appropriate. You are in a position to plough back into the community. It's your duty to see that there is never a repeat [of this kind of murder]" (Drug killer mom given 280 hours community service, 2009).[12]

The murder of Adam (who was called Abie) and the subsequent "light" sentence of Ellen was widely reported on, nationally as well as internationally, with most of the focus falling on the drug scourge under which Coloured people (people of mixed race) on the Cape Flats are living. The Cape Flats refer to a low-lying area on the outskirts of Cape Town where many non-white people were forcefully relocated to during South Africa's Apartheid years. Lavender Hill, where Ellen Pakkies still resides, form a part of the Cape Flats. For many years, The Flats (as it is locally called) has been a war zone with gang related shootings happening daily. Swingler (2014) cites Major General Jeremy Vearey,

[12] As I write this another mother is awaiting trial in the Western Cape town of George for stabbing her drug-addicted 29-year old son to death (Mortlock, 2016).

Provincial Commander of Operation Combat (the specialised SAPS[13] Western Cape anti-gang strategy unit) as saying that "there are 12 recognised street gangs and three prison gangs in the Western Cape; however, there are tens of smaller gangs and an estimate from the early nineties lists the total number of gangs in Cape Town at 130". On 8 July 2012 the then Western Cape premiere, Helen Zille, released a statement wherein she made public the fact that she has written to the president of South Africa, Jacob Zuma, requesting that the South African National Defence Force be deployed in Lavender Hill and Hanover Park. Zille wrote that "there has been a serious 'spike' in gang violence in some Cape Town suburbs in recent months, during which at least 23 people, including seven children, have died" (Zille, 2012). President Jacob Zuma declined the premiere's request. The SABC[14] News reported in September 2016 that the national crime statistics (which was released on 2 September 2016) indicate that "seven of the ten police offices in the country where the most murders were reported, are in townships in Cape Town" (Mixed reaction to Cape Flats crime stats, 2016). This is an indication that the issues surrounding gangs already noted in 2012 by the Western Cape premier are still continuing.

Gang wars are mostly linked to the drug trade and violence erupts when gangs challenge other gangs' dominance in certain areas. The drug most commonly made and sold on The Flats the past decade, is tik. Tik (or tuk-tuk as it is sometimes called in an onomatopoetic reference to the sound it makes as it is smoked) is what most people living in the Western Cape call crystal methamphetamine. It is a psychoactive stimulant that increases alertness and stamina. It induces feelings of euphoria, enhances self-esteem, and could lead to a heightened libido. Prolonged use is associated with aggression. Tik is typically sold in straws which could cost between R15 and R30. It is highly addictive (Khumalo, 2010). In November 2013 *The Herald Scotland* reported the following:

> Tik only emerged eight years ago on the Cape Flats and since then its use has increased dramatically, with devastating social consequences. It has triggered a sharp increase in criminality – in a country already plagued by high crime figures when it comes to rape, carjacking, house invasion and murder – overwhelmed prevention and treatment initiatives, and thwarted efforts to cope with the HIV/Aids epidemic. The Cape Flats and surrounding areas have the highest proportion of crystal meth addiction in the world. At Cape Town's drug counselling centre, its new director, Ashley Potts, says one in five children on the Cape Flats, some as young as six years old, are on tik. In 2004, 12,000 Cape Flats schoolchildren were using tik, and within five years the figure had risen to 69,000. The figure is higher now. (South

[13] South African Police Service
[14] South African Broadcasting Corporation

Africa Breaks Bad, 2013)

The information imparted so far, is known to most people who live in the Western Cape, South Africa. Those of us lucky enough not to live on The Flats, know this through daily news reports of yet another murder, rape or armed robbery in printed media, radio and the occasional documentary. Others know this because it is the life they live. The life lived by people in Lavender Hill is by no means a normal life. It is important for the reader to understand that an audience in South Africa who watches My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies will probably know about Lavender Hill and all that living there entails: poverty, substance abuse, gang violence, domestic violence, poor education and unemployment. They will most likely know about the real Ellen Pakkies and have an opinion about her filicidal deed and her sentence. I have therefore decided to include prior knowledge of Lavender Hill in my analysis of the text. This text was written for a South African audience with the before-mentioned understanding of a very specific South African problem. The general locale of this play is of enormous importance in understanding what happened on the morning of 12 September 2007 and I argue that I can safely assume that most South African audience members would understand implicit references to life in Lavender Hill.

At the trial of Ellen Pakkies, forensic psychiatrist Martin Yodaikin testified for the defence. He stated that Ellen was in a state of disassociation when she killed her son, Abie, and that, because of the abuse she had suffered through her life and now at the hands of her son, Abie came to represent all her perpetrators that fateful morning. He speaks of Ellen Pakkies as having two sides to her personality in relation to Abie; the loving mother and the abused woman. The loving mother being able to give the eulogy at the son she murdered's funeral and the abused woman being able to murder. Yodaikin stops short of calling it two personalities, but rather "two distinct sides of her personality" (Samodien, 2008). This would mean that she was not, in fact, diagnosed with dissociative identity disorder (also called multiple personality disorder). Martin Yodaikin's testimony was widely reported on and it would thus be conceivable that Lizz Meiring, in writing this play, would have had this information. Ellen Pakkies's past and current abuse, life in Lavender Hill and her alleged state of disassociation could account for her light sentence.

Ellen's story have resulted in at least one book (*Dealing in Death: Ellen Pakkies and a community's struggle with Tik* by Sylvia Walker released in 2009), one documentary which aired on the Crime Investigation Channel numerous times (The Ellen Pakkies Story by Michael Duffett from Face2Face production company), one movie (Unathi Magaqua's Love you to death) and one stage play which is the focus of this chapter. My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies has had more than 500 performances and both the actors and the writer, Lizz Meiring, have received numerous theatre awards for their

efforts (Cowie, 2011). I will, however, refrain from the inclusion of any further references to the actual Ellen in this thesis. I have stated in chapter one that it is my aim to establish whether the proven factors that could drive a mother to kill her own child are in fact present in a dramatic text, and that is what I will be doing with this text, only allowing for past knowledge of Lavender Hill and Martin Yodaikin's testimony of Ellen's state of disassociation at the time of the murder, to be acknowledged for the stated reasons.

6.3 Synopsis

There are only two characters in My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies; Ellen and her son, Abie. We meet them when Abie is fourteen, at which age he is introduced to tik. The play's time of action is not disclosed but spans many years. The dramatic time is a mere 60 minutes. In these sixty minutes we see Abie becoming a tik addict, stealing from his mother and becoming progressively more abusive and violent towards Ellen. We hear of Ellen's constant fear and her numerous attempts at securing societal intervention. Not having succeeded, Ellen strangles Abie after six years of constant abuse. She attends his funeral where she delivers the eulogy, goes to court for his murder and is sentenced to 280 hours community service. Abie is present at all these happenings and the play ends with a conversation between mother and son about the act of forgiveness. Although the story unfolds chronologically, the play is not divided into scenes but rather several small units. These units take place in specific locales which are suggested rather than shown. Some of these contain direct dialogue between Ellen and Abie, but most are direct communication to the audience by either or both of the characters.

Meiring states on page one of the play that My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies is a memory play. Wade Bradford defines a memory play as "a play that focuses on the past as narrated by the main character" (Bradford, 2016). The title of this play would suggest that we will therefore be hearing this story from Ellen's perspective. This is not the case though, and we hear the story from both Ellen and Abie's perspective. This deviation allows the writer the opportunity to humanise both characters. Ellen and Abie tell the audience why they did what they did and by addressing the audience directly, Meiring made it impossible for us to ignore the human behind the criminal behaviour as well as the desperation of a whole community living in Lavender Hills.

6.4 Analysis

I will start my analysis of My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies from a psychiatric and psychological perspective in light of Yodaikin's testimony at the actual trial of Ellen Pakkies. As there are extensive overlapping between the different perspectives on maternal filicide, I will not categorise all the

indicators associated with maternal filicide found in the text as belonging to specific perspectives, though, but rather follow a more holistic route.

As mentioned earlier, Martin Yodaikin, a forensic psychiatrist who testified at the real Ellen Pakkies's trial, stated that she killed her son whilst being in a state of disassociation. Dissociative symptoms are common in dissociative disorders as well as in stress disorders. It must be mentioned that not one of these groupings of disorders have been identified through research as closely associated with maternal filicide, though. Both these groupings of disorders lie on Axis I of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) assessment system which means symptoms could be acute and need to be treated. People with Axis I disorders usually have impaired functioning in their home and work environment (Sue et al, 2010: 175). Sue et al (2010: 149) define a dissociative disorder as a mental disorder "in which a person's identity, memory, and consciousness are altered or disrupted". Of the four dissociative disorders (dissociative amnesia, dissociative fugue, depersonalization disorder and multiple personality disorder), the most common disorder is depersonalization disorder. It has already been established that the real Ellen does not suffer from multiple personality disorder and as this is fact-based theatre, one can safely assume that the Ellen character would thus also not have this disorder. The Ellen character also does not exhibit symptoms of amnesia or fugue. Sue et al (2010: 153) define depersonalization disorder as "characterised by feelings of unreality concerning the self and the environment". A person suffering from this disorder might feel detached from his/her own thoughts and actions, but not to the extent of being delusional. The ability to do reality testing thus remains intact. As the name of the disorder suggests, it could lead a sufferer to feel like an automaton (mechanical and robotic). The condition is often accompanied by mood and anxiety disorders and are often linked to trauma experienced by the individual (Sue et al, 2010: 154).

Of the stress disorders, acute and post-traumatic stress disorders are the only ones relevant to this text as the other disorders have physical symptoms which Ellen does not manifest. The symptoms of these two disorders are similar: anxiety, dissociative symptoms, emotional withdrawal, and attempts to forget traumatic memories or events (Sue et al, 2010: 200). What differentiates them is time of onset after a traumatic event and duration of symptoms. Acute stress disorder (ASD) is characterized by anxiety and dissociation that happens within one month of exposure to a traumatic event, whereas with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) onset of symptoms could be at any time. Sue et al (2010: 176) also points out that "[a]n individual with an initial diagnoses of acute stress disorder (ASD) is likely to receive a diagnoses of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) if the symptoms persist for more than four weeks". Depression is also common in individuals suffering from PTSD (Sue et al, 2010: 177).

As will be discussed at some length later in this section, there are ample evidence that Ellen had an extremely traumatic childhood with numerous traumatic events. Sue et al (2010: 178) point out that there seems to be evidence that PTSD can also develop in people exposed to repeated sub traumatic stressors such as employment and marital problems. Ellen lives in Lavender Hill and is exposed to sub traumatic stressors every day of her life. Davids (2005: 23) writes that much research have found that chronic exposure to violence (as experienced by people living in Lavender Hill) could lead to anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress symptoms. There is also the more recent abuse by Abie (as found on pages, 3-10) that constitute repeated trauma.

As mentioned earlier, clinical depression has been linked to both depersonalization disorder and PTSD and as such I will also be looking for possible manifestations of depression in Ellen.

The play starts with both Abie and Ellen speaking directly to the audience regarding the other. Ellen tells us that Abie is fourteen years old and still in school. The audience or reader meet them just before Abie starts using tik. Even though the mood is convivial with Ellen folding washing (all items are white or off-white), there is already mention of Ellen's past which would constitute the background story component of this text. The stage directions asks for a sparse, almost all-white set and Abie tells the audience: "As sy al's kon reg bleach, het sy, Fix it with JIK!" (If she could correct everything with bleach, she would have) (page 2).

Ellen's preference for white can be seen as a metaphor that works on many levels. It refers to her active attempts to forget; the possibility of starting over; and the absence of colour. Ellen's bleaching symbolises her active attempts at getting rid of the dirt that stain her psyche because of her traumatic childhood. There are many references in the text to her active attempts to forget past trauma, for instance on page four:

> ELLEN: Oor 'n past wat…Daai's woorde wat nie (wys na haar mond) nie hier moet uit nie. (About a past that…Those are words that should not (indicates to her mouth) come out of here.)
>
> Mens kan nie gaan sit in die past nie. (One can't languish in the past.)

Ellen's attempts at "bleaching" her world reminds us of a blank page on which someone could "start again". On page three Ellen refers to Abie as "my last born, my new beginning". Two sentences later she says "vir die eerste keer in my lewe was ek op 'n kalm plek" (for the first time in my life I was at a calm place). Near the end of the play, just before she enters his room and kills him, she says:

> Hoeveel keer kan mens van vooraf begin? (How many times can one start over?)

> Als uitvee en net weer, asof daar nooit niks was nie, B-E-G-I-N. (Wipe everything, and just start again, as if there never was anything.)
>
> It's a little game I quietly play in my head. "Ellen, forget everything, pretend nothing ever happened before, then you start all over again". (page 9)

After the murder and court case, on page fourteen, she says: "Every morning, when I walk past Abie's hokkie[15], I play that 'new beginnings' game".

The play's last line is spoken by Ellen: "Ai Abie, hoeveel keer kan mens van vooraf begin?" (How many times can one start from the beginning?) (page 14). All these references to new beginnings are symbolised by the white surroundings. These attempts to suppress painful memories are consistent with an individual suffering from PTSD. It does point to a resilience not usually found in people with depression though.

The whiteness also refers to an absence of colour and it is this side of the metaphor that interests me more if I am looking for dissociative symptoms in Ellen. On page one Abie tells the audience that Ellen "never asks for much, my Ma. In fact, sy vra nooit vir niks nie (she never asks for anything). Shame. Sy praat ook nie maklik nie. (She doesn't speak easily.) Quiet mouse. Very polite. No big dreams. No big nothing". The picture Abie draws of his mother is decidedly devoid of any colour. On page two Ellen laughs at something Abie says and he comments on this:

> ABIE: Ek like it as jy lag, mommy. Dan weet ek darem jy's hier. (I like it when you laugh, mommy. Then at least I know that you are here.)
>
> ELLEN: Maar ek is mos hier. (But I am here.)
>
> ABIE: No, I mean…nevermind.

This passage is a possible indication that Ellen was emotionally absent prior to Abie's addiction and that he noticed/experienced this. On page three Ellen asks that the audience believe her when she says she initially had no idea that Abie had started using tik. She says that she can "give you all the excuses – too busy, too blind". One wonders if "too emotionally absent" could not also apply. Half a page later Abie accuses Ellen of not caring that he is bullied at school and by his half-brother (Ellen's son by another man): "En jy vra nie. Jy worry nie" (And you don't ask. You don't care.) (page 3). About

[15] Abie's hokkie refers to a temporary structure erected in Ellen's backyard. These structures, also called shacks, are usually built from corrugated iron or wood.

Ellen's inability to speak he says the following:

> ABIE: Ons hou ons bekke, nê? Ons vreet almal se kak op en ons sluk en sharrup. (We keep our mouths shut, hey? We eat everyone's shit and swallow and shut up.)
>
> ELLEN: Mens praat nie so nie. (One doesn't speak like that.)
>
> ABIE: At least praat ek. (At least I talk.)
>
> ELLEN: What happened to you? Ek praat nie sulke goed nie! (I don't talk about these things.)
>
> ABIE: Well then…sorry….I don't speak "silence". (page 3)

On page eight Ellen refers to herself as "battery operated Ellen. After a while…there is nothing". She compares her eyes to the eyes of the old woman she is caring for at work and finds the old woman's younger looking. She sees how the old woman struggles to breath and wishes that she, Ellen, can just stop breathing. She says this in relation to Abie's abuse of her but her detachment seems to have started before his tik habit spiralled out of control. On page four Abie addresses the audience directly and tells us that when he was a young boy, he blamed his mother's sadness on himself and that even if she laughed, she never smiled. It seems his role was to entertain her so that they could "pretend she's happy". He refers to her "always sad blood" and that he, himself, seems to have inherited it: "Ek het somehow die feeling, van kleintyd, I'm just visiting this planet…meer vir 'n long weekend as 'n lifetime" (Somehow I had this feeling since childhood, that I am merely visiting this planet…more for a long week-end than a lifetime). A few lines later (still on page four) he says: "when I was fourteen I wanted to be a superstar. Now I just want to be…normal". When Abie's stepfather tells him that he is hurting Ellen with his tik habit, Abie says:

> Ek doen dit nie vir cruel wees nie, ek doen dit vir iets voel. (I don't do it to be cruel, I do it in order to feel something.)
>
> 'Cause in this house, moet jy apparently, niks voel nie, niks praat nie, niks complain nie, niks wys nie. Dan's jy alive. (Because in this house one must apparently not feel anything, say anything, complain about anything or show anything. Then you're alive.) (page 5)

These passages point to the possibility that Ellen does in fact suffer from depression. The fact that Abie feels that he has inherited her "always sad blood" could be a further affirmation of this finding as research has shown a hereditary component to this illness (Sue et al, 2010: 305).

That Ellen experiences her current situation of living with a child addicted to tik as traumatic and life-

threatening is evident in the following passages:

> ELLEN: We must get him out.
>
> I'm scared of my own child.
>
> Niks hou hom uit nie, niks. (Nothing keeps him out, nothing.)
>
> Hy gaan ons vrek maak. (He is going to kill us.) (page 6)

The next scene on page six is the first time where we're shown Abie's violence towards his mother. The scene starts with Ellen on the phone asking to speak with Superintendent Abrahms. She says that she was "there yesterday again" and "ek kom vra elke dag" (I come and ask every day), "I've asked for an interdict". This short speech clearly illustrates Ellen's repeated attempts to get police protection from Abie whom she fears. While on the telephone to the police, Abie enters and threatens her with a knife. The stage directions note that Abie pushes her against the table and with her back to him presses his body against her. It asks that the scene be left open to the audience's interpretation, i.e. is Abie raping (sodomising) his mother or not? If indeed a rape is taking place, this would constitute a severely traumatic event. Even if Abie is not raping her, he is holding a knife to her throat and forcing her to say that she is wrong and a "hoermeid" (whore-maid). He spits in her face and cuts her arm. Physical as well as emotional abuse is thus present in this scene which in itself, is traumatic enough to possibly cause PTSD or depersonalization disorder. From the formalist text analysis perspective, the conflict between mother and son has escalated to the point of violence. Conflict in My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies needs to be understood in a broader sense, though. There exists in this text the conflict between two characters with opposing objectives, of course, but the conflict also lies within the individual and the society, the law-abiding citizen and the criminal, the traumatic past and attempts at normalcy, the Christian and the God who doesn't answer and the Apartheid legacy and democracy.

After Ellen has banished Abie from the house she hides in her room with bars that she had put up in an effort to keep Abie and the other addicts at bay. She calls Abie a monster four times in the text and accuses him and his friends of threatening to rape her if she doesn't give them food and money. She says that she even uses a "pisspot" (chamber pot) at night for fear of leaving her room to go to the bathroom (page 8).

The filicidal scene (page nine) starts with Ellen bringing Abie tea and cereal in his backyard shack. He throws the tea and cereal at her head. Ellen's repeated attempts to illicit conversation are met with only expletives. He says "fokof" (fuck off) twice, "voertsek" (get lost – command usually used on dogs) and "fokof jou poes. Hoermeid!" (fuck off you cunt. Whore-maid!). This is the second time

Abie calls Ellen the latter. It must be noted that the word “meid” is a very derogatory term for women of mixed race in South Africa and associated with the degradation suffered by non-whites at the hand of their oppressors during Apartheid in South Africa. Earlier in the play Abie mentions the fact that his half-brother seems to be able to do with him as he pleases and asks if this is in fact because he is the bastard of a white man (page 3). The real Abie (Adam Pakkies) was twenty when he died in 2012 which means he was born around 1992. As he was Ellen’s youngest child, this would mean that any older siblings would have been conceived and born during the Apartheid years. Although the Immorality Amendment Act 1950 which prohibited sexual relations between Europeans and non-Europeans was lifted in 1985 (Wikipedia, 2016: “Immorality Act 1927”), I feel it is unlikely that Ellen would have had social dealings with a white man during the eighties. This leads me to conclude that Ellen was, in all likelihood, at some stage in her life raped by a white man.

If indeed Ellen suffered from depression (there are no indications of bipolar disorder as she does not exhibit symptoms associated with mania), it did not affect her ability to function in society. She still attended church, she went to work diligently, she attended to the household chores and had enough energy to help build Abie a shack in their back yard as well as put up burglar bars to try and keep him out of the house. She was also very active in her attempts to get help. There are no references in the text of sleeping or eating fluctuations which are physiological symptoms of depression. Ellen’s cognitions, however, correlate with that of a depressed individual in that she expresses feelings of guilt and a wish to “stop breathing” (page 8). With regard to the affective symptomology associated with depression there are indications in the text that she might have suffered from this condition. Her “always sad blood” (page 4) point to a depressed mood most of the time and her emotional withdrawal might be indicative of an inability to experience pleasure rather than dissociation. What I do not find in the text however, are references to crying spells. Ellen cries only once in this text and that is during the court case. This level of emotional numbing is not usually associated with depression. Just before Ellen strangles her son with a rope she ties around the bed, the stage directions state “*we see her face changing to a complete deadpan expression*” (page 10). The author clearly wants the audience to interpret Ellen’s consequent actions as performed in an unemotional state, possibly therefore a state of dissociation (as was testified to at the real Ellen’s trial).

With regard to depersonalization disorder, I could find no literature that allows for a single dissociative event to lead to a diagnoses of this condition. One could argue that Ellen’s emotional absence prior to the murder could be due to depersonalization, but with no concrete information in the text pointing to this, I would be speculating. I am of the opinion that her efforts to forget the past seems too active and conscious for someone with depersonalization disorder. I am thus of the opinion that the Ellen we meet in My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies suffers from PTSD with depression.

The amount of trauma present in her life, her emotional withdrawal and the dissociative symptoms at the time of the murder point me in that direction. As mentioned earlier, it must be noted though that PTSD was not found to be associated with maternal filicide in my (albeit cursory) literature review of this multifactorial phenomenon.

The psychosocial perspective on maternal filicide posits that environment and a history of trauma are contributing factors when a mother kills her child. Neurobiologists also posit a causal link between childhood trauma and behavioural difficulties in adulthood. The first aspect I will look at is Ellen's traumatic childhood. This constitutes the background story component of this play although one could argue that the general locale, Lavender Hill, also contributes to the background story in that, had they not lived where they lived for the reasons they lived there, possibly none of these events would have taken place. In Ellen's very first speech she tells Abie to be grateful they have a house at all, even if it is in Lavender Hill, because at least it is not an abandoned truck or a "stinking backroom where you couldn't even use the toilet…and for rental you were… (*she wants to say "rented" but she stops herself*)…never mind" (page 1). Although it is not explicitly stated, I can comfortably deduce from this passage that Ellen is referring to her past. We do not know yet if she is talking about her childhood or her early adult years, but the reference to being rented out (one can only assume for sex) implies abuse by an authoritative figure.

Some of Ellen's dialogue alluding to a traumatic past have been discussed earlier in this chapter in relation to her attempts to start over, but the following instances more clearly point to a past that could have been traumatic. On page three Ellen says that she is in a calm place for the first time in her life and that she has a husband who doesn't beat her. This could point to past husbands or partners who did, in fact, beat her. At the very least this passage admits to a past that was not calm, leading me to suspect past abuse of some sort.

> ELLEN: Mens kan nie gaan sit in die past nie. Jy sal nooit opstaan nie. I'm not the only one who had it bad. (You can't languish in the past. You will never stand up.) (page 4)

This is the first time where it is stated explicitly that she "had it bad" in the past. Ellen tells us that her husband blames her for Abie's addiction. She says that, even though he doesn't say it, she knows that he is thinking that it is because of her past that Abie is what he is. That he inherited her bad blood (page 8). The fact that her husband might assign blame to Ellen because of her past does not necessarily mean she was a perpetrator in the past. Victims of abuse are often blamed for their role in the abuse.

Affirmation of past abuse and the extent of this abuse, is given at the end of the play after the filicidal

act was committed. At Abie's funeral, he is present as a prompt for Ellen who is delivering the eulogy. He says to his mother: "daai oggend, was ek die gesig van elke mens wat jou nog ooit abuse het" (That morning, my face became the face of every person who has ever abused you) (page 12). This clearly indicates extended abuse suffered by Ellen at the hands of numerous perpetrators. During the court case Ellen laments the fact that her whole being is being scrutinised including her "carefully hidden, long buried past" (page 12). She quotes a court official as having said during the trial that "as a baby, Mrs Pakkies was living under an abandoned truck with her single mother" (page 12). Even during the court proceedings Ellen does not talk about her past and the author uses Abie to give us the horrific facts: "raped from age four…constant abuse, alcoholic parents…bedwetting…gang raped…prostitution…promiscuous, couldn't cope at school, previous abusive marriages…limited education" (page 12).

I can safely conclude that there are sufficient indications to severe past trauma in My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies which could, in conjunction with other factors, have led this mother to kill her child.

It has been established that the general locale of this play is Lavender Hill on the Cape Flats. The opening lines of the play belong to Abie:

> Lavender hell, - Hill, sounds like life in overdrive en ruik soos wasgoed en buttons en dagga en cheap dop en tik en te veel desperate mense ingedruk in hokke (and smells like washing and mandrax and marijuana and cheap alcohol and tik and too many desperate people squashed into cages.). But it's a world famous place – (*beat*) winner of "the most violent spot on earth" Yeah. No lavender here. (page 1)

In this first passage of the play the author gives a very clear context where within this story unfolds. For a South African audience it provides given circumstances pertaining to time, economics, politics, society and even spirituality. The cages Abie refers to are the municipal flats that were built to house the people that were forcefully removed from other suburbs in Cape Town during the Apartheid years. He is also referring to the fact that any one house in Lavender Hill could have a number of other families living in tin shacks or wooden houses in the back yard. Ellen refers to Abie as being still at school at age fourteen. In most developed countries this would not necessarily merit mention, but in this community where children drop out of school because of a dizzying array of reasons, it is something she is very proud of.

The lurking threat of violence is everywhere. Abie says he wanted to be an animal doctor and that he "tried to save every stupid little bird wat sy vlerke gewaag het in gangland". (…that dared to fly in gangland) (page 2). A bird can fly, but even it is not safe in Lavender Hill. When Abie leaves for the

café Ellen shouts after him “en jy loop nie draaie nie. Jy gaan lol nie by die skollies nie! (And don’t go meandering about. Don’t go bothering/interfering with the criminals/gangsters) (page 2). In a society where the majority of the people are unemployed, displaced and uneducated, criminality is rife. Ellen’s plea is futile in that we know that Abie was not the exception to the rule who managed to avoid the tik offering gangsters. After Abie started using tik, Ellen says she should have known it seeing as “there’s more tik than bricks around here” (page 3). These lines paint a grim picture of the inevitability of children becoming tik addicts in The Flats. Abie defends his tik habit by saying that life in Lavender Hill gave him no choice but to look for happiness in a drug:

> ABIE: As ek choice gehad het (if I had the choice), you think I want to live here?
>
> You think I want to hang around with all these sad, desperate, fucked-up, tired people of Lavender Hill? [ ] One of the bra’s who runs around with me, he says he read somewhere on a wall – “you make your own happiness”
>
> Wel, ek koop hom en ek light hom en ek enjoy hom. (Well, I buy it, and I light it and I enjoy it.) (page 5)

This passage also alludes to the fact that Abie might not still be in school as he is now “running around” with some bra’s (slang word for brother). The words on the wall also gives the impression of graffiti, often associated with gang turfs in The Flats.

Research has shown that filicidal acts are often predated by attempts to get help from society. There are many references to Ellen’s attempts to get help from the police, social workers and the church. She says she did in fact manage to get interdicts against Abie, prohibiting him from entering her property, but that the police were useless in implementing them. When Abie contravened the interdicts, they would arrest him only to release him again, because they believe him when he says he steals from Ellen because she doesn’t give him food. The social workers at Pollsmoor prison told her that there are too many tik addicts and that “parents should take responsibility for their own children” (page 8). The church offered “sympathy and prayers and mumbled words of faint hope” (page 8). What is interesting though, is that although society failed in helping Ellen with her addict son, she was by no means isolated or marginalised. She was happy at her place of work and calls it a “job with nice people” (page 3). She was a church goer. Llewellyn MacMaster (2009) writes that people of colour in South Africa have always been people of faith and that the faith communities operating in the townships today are just as invaluable to the broader community as it was during the years of Apartheid. Yet this faith community could do nothing to prevent Ellen from killing her son.

The Pakkies household was poor, but not destitute. Ellen had a job as did her husband even if it was a low paying one. This put them in a better financial position than most in Lavender Hill. They were not homeless and there was enough money for food, basic education and an occasional treat at the café (page 2).

Substance abuse by the filicidal mother has been shown to be a contributing factor in the death of a child. I find no evidence in this text that Ellen abused alcohol or drugs. The text does however mention that her education level was low and that she had to teach herself how to read and write (page 12). Limited education has also been associated with maternal filicide.

It seems clear from the text that Ellen did not have a secure attachment to her mother. She was raped at age four and alludes to the fact that it could have been her mother who rented her out for money. Her parents were alcoholics and even though it is not explicitly said that the constant abuse she underwent as a child was at the hands of her parents, one could safely assume that at the very least she was neglected by them. This is also alluded to by the fact that she had to teach herself to read and write (page 12), a job usually reserved for a teacher or a parent.

Feminist psychologists argue that maternal filicide might occur in situations where the mother feels stripped of all power. This is indeed the case in My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies. Even though the play starts with a woman who seemingly had the resilience to overcome a severely traumatic youth, it is evident from the start that, although she has a home, a job and a husband who doesn't beat her, she still experiences relational difficulties with others even prior to Abie's addiction. When Abie started using tik and society failed her, Ellen's carefully fabricated life of choice evaporated and she was faced with the same loss of agency she experienced as a child. Ellen had no choices as a child growing up with abusive parents, she had no choices in a community ostracised by the laws of the country, she had no choices as a Lavender Hill resident exposed to continual violence and she had no choices when her youngest son became her final perpetrator.

6.5 Conclusion

My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies consists of only fourteen A4 pages of which much is not dialogue but stage directions and technical specifications. I am of the opinion though, that Lizz Meiring managed to create a world where this mother's filicidal act seems believable and even forgivable. In the blurp of Sylvia Walker's book (*Dealing with death: Ellen Pakkies and a community's struggle with tik*, n.d.) it states the following:

> Ellen Pakkies stood up for herself and said why she did it, how she did it and that she didn't

> want to stop even though he pleaded with her. THAT is why this is a relevant story to tell and why it's one that should be read. It's every mother's nightmare to see her child become addicted to drugs and it's even worse when no matter what you do, you know you can't help them…

This sentiment (which arguably was and still is shared by many in South Africa) that Ellen is a righteous woman who did what needed to be done, have frightening repercussions in a country with an already established culture of violence. When maternal filicide becomes sanctioned it is a clear indication of the complete breakdown of societal structures intended to regulate optimal functioning.

If in fact Ellen Pakkies suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder with depression, it would correlate with much research that have been done on this condition. Traut, Kaminer, Boshoff, Seedat, Hawkridge and Stein (2002: 67) write that high rates of PTSD have been reported "among children exposed to chronic traumas such as ongoing political violence, war and displacement, urban community violence and repeated physical and sexual abuse". Ellen was exposed to all of these. Amy Green (2015) cites a report released July 2015 by the Trauma Centre for Survivors of Violence and Torture wherein all of the 323 mental health patients whose files were analysed, display symptomology of post-traumatic stress disorder. These patients all live on The Flats (Green, 2015). It seems very conceivable then that Ellen Pakkies might suffer from PTSD. She experienced severe childhood trauma as well as ongoing chronic trauma in the form of marginalisation and victimisation. She exhibits dissociative symptoms. She is emotionally withdrawn and actively tries to forget traumatic events in her past. She also exhibits cognitions and affect associated with depression; an illness often presenting as comorbid with PTSD.

As a closing thought I would like to mention that some research I found point to a causal relationship between PTSD and neonaticide and infanticide, but a cursory search for literature linking PTSD with the killing of older children, was fruitless. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, this leads me to believe that we have in South Africa a very unique situation regarding maternal filicide. Both Davies (2008) and Franciska (2014: 10) argue that there seems to be little research done on maternal filicide in the South African context. I wonder if, should more research be done, PTSD might not more often be found to be present in mothers who kill their children in South Africa.

Chapter 7: *And all the children cried*

7.1 Introduction

And all the children cried, written by Judith Jones and Beatrix Campbell, was published in 2002 and had its premiere at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in April 2002. The writing of the text started four years earlier, though. In 1998 the writers collaborated with a cast of five and a director, to devise, improvise and write this play. There was another workshop in 1999, this time with a new cast. It was only in 2001 that a rehearsed reading of the final draft led to the scheduling of the play at the WY Playhouse (Jones & Campbell, 2002: authors' note).

I will start this chapter with background information about the two authors as I believe this to be paramount to an understanding of *And all the children cried* (Jones & Campbell, 2002). This will be followed by a synopsis of the play, the analysis and finally my conclusions. In the interest of brevity, I will not reference Jones and Campbell for the remainder of this chapter and the reader must conclude that all references to *And all the children cried*, as well as all page numbers, refer to Jones and Campbell's text which was published in 2002.

7.2 Background

In North-east England, in the county of Cleveland, 121 children were put into government care in 1987 on suspicion of having been sexually abused at home. Many of the children were so young (or developmentally delayed) as to be pre-verbal. At the time, this was the largest sexual abuse case England had been confronted with and the first involving numerous victims and multiple perpetrators. The outcry started when two paediatricians, Dr Marietta Higgs and Dr Geoffrey Wyatt, who were newly working at Middlesbrough General Hospital, used Reflex Anal Dilatation (RAD) to diagnose sexual abuse on children who had been brought to the hospital for other, unrelated reasons. RAD had been condemned as an experimental and invasive diagnostic technique and the two paediatricians were labelled child-snatchers and home-wreckers by the media, as well as by MP Stuart Bell who were the self-appointed spokesperson of the "innocent parents" (Tate, 2013).

The government ordered an enquiry be held into the matter which heard evidence from all involved except the children. A year later it concluded that most of the diagnoses were incorrect and 94 of the 121 children were returned to their homes. Bizarrely, the same enquiry also found that there were significant concerns raised by social services about most of the children's welfare prior to them being taken to the Middlesbrough General Hospital. Years after the event, it became apparent that most of the children were sent back to lives of sexual abuse and that "mistakes were made", as the regional

medical officer of Cleveland at the time of the scandal finally admitted in 2007. For Tim Tate, director and producer of *Cleveland: Unspeakable Truths* (1997, Channel four), a documentary about the Cleveland Case – as it became known – the tragedy lies in the fact that children were abused in their homes, briefly rescued, and then "re-abused by a child protection system which could not bear the pressure from politicians and press" (Tate, 2013; Wikipedia, 2016: "Cleveland child abuse scandal").

Harpin (2011: 106) writes that child sexual abuse, although not a new phenomenon, only really became a social subject in Britain from the 1970s and then only because of the continued advocacy of the women's liberation movement. It was only in the 1980s though that it was begrudgingly admitted that sexual abuse and murder could happen in the family home in contrast to the "stranger danger" policy which was advocated by the Thatcher administration. According to Harpin (2011: 106) this realisation

> destabilized the family, ruptured the presumed safety of domesticity, offered a space for silenced voices and collectively demanded that Britain look and listen again and in new ways. Thus, from 1980 onwards there have been innumerable new British plays that tackle the topic of child sexual abuse.

Beatrix Campbell was one of the journalists covering the Cleveland Case and felt very strongly that the two doctors were villainised as "witches on a feminist crusade" (Harpin, 2011: 171)[16]. In 1988 she wrote a book, *Unofficial Secrets: Child Sexual Abuse – The Cleveland Case* (London: Virago, 1988). In 1998 she, along with social worker Judith Jones, started work on the play *And all the children cried* (which first performed in 2002). Sydney-Leigh (2014) writes in her review of a performance of *And all the children cried*, that the character of Gail "is based on various case studies". Similarly in his review of a performance he attended, Mark Tyson (2004) also refers to *And all the children cried* as docudrama. Yet the authors' note in the published text make no mention of this. The programme of their premiere at the West Yorkshire Playhouse also excludes any mention of this play being fact-based theatre. The reason I felt it important to start this chapter with the Cleveland Case was to draw attention to the fact that Beatrix Campbell was actively involved as a journalist in at least one child abuse story. On her website she refers to herself as "writer, feminist, green party, playwright, broadcaster and social commentator" (Campbell, 2016).

Judith Jones is a social worker that sat on an "Independent Review Team" (Wikipedia, 2016) in 1998 which found that two nursery workers who were exonerated from abuse charges in 1994, were in fact

[16] One year after MP Stuart Bell felt that "it was time to draw a veil over the past" (Harpin, 2001: 171), he wrote his own book, *When Salem Came to the Boro: The True Story of the Cleveland Child Abuse Case* (London: Pan, 1988).

guilty of "sadistic and sexual abuse of up to 350 children" (as reported by Beatrix Campbell in the *Daily Express*,1998) (Bristow, 2002). The alleged perpetrators sued the newspaper and the Independent Review Team for libel and was awarded the maximum possible damages of £200 00 each. The judge in the libel case made a "very rare finding of malice on the part of the Independent Review Team" (Wikipedia, 2016).

The picture that emerges of Beatrix Campbell and Judith Jones, is one of activists fighting tooth and nails for abused children in a war against the adults who are supposed to protect and nurture them. Why then would these two women write a play where one of the protagonists is a mother who admits to killing her two children and the other one is Myra Hindley[17]? The answer possibly lies in the feminist perspective on maternal filicide as being a product of a patriarchal society's systemic violence against women and children and the subsequent recurrence of intra family abuse. Some of the numerous reviews written of performances of *And all the children cried* mention the fact that the evening consisted of two parts; the first the show and the second a discussion between cast, audience and invited speakers about the issues raised by the play. This clearly positions *And all the children cried* as theatre of advocacy which is to be expected if the authors are activists. My research question is not however, if the plays analysed succeed in relaying the (in this case decidedly political) message, but whether the filicidal characters are adhering to the proven cognitions, affect, physiology and behaviour associated with this crime. As such I will not focus my discussion on the inclusion of Myra Hindley in the play as this inclusion had as its function "to ask questions boldly" (Jones & Campbell, 2002: authors' note). Tyson (2004) writes that, at the time *And all the children cried* was written, there was a national debate about whether Hindley should be released from prison or not, and that the play "was an intervention into that debate". Myra, although a child killer, never killed her own children though. The analysis of *And all the children cried* will thus focus on the fictional character of Gail.

7.3 Synopsis

And all the children cried has two onstage characters (Myra and Gail) and eight screen characters (clerk of the court, barrister for the defence, girl, foreman of the jury, Dawn, Barbara, Mother and Father). The screen characters are pre-recorded and shown to the audience on a video screen as per the stage directions. Gail was sentenced to eight years imprisonment for manslaughter, of which she has already served two (page 23) and Myra has been incarcerated for 36 years. The inclusion of Myra positions this play in Britain as that is where the real Myra was incarcerated until her death in 2002.

[17] Myra Hindley and partner Ian Brady were sentenced to life imprisonment in 1966 for the torture and murder of five children in what came to be known as the Moors Murders. Hindley died in prison in 2002 (Moors Murders, n.d.).

The specific locale, given by stage directions (page 19) as the mise en scène, is the prison cells in which the women are awaiting the parole board's decisions regarding their separate requests for parole a fortnight ago. The cell doors are open which allows free movement between the two spaces.

The story that unfolds is mainly Gail's story, probably seeing as most people already know Myra's story. Gail, her two younger sisters and younger brothers (the text never mentions how many) were sexually abused by their father with their mother encouraging and enabling the abuse. The parents also let other men rape their children and received payment in return. Some of the rapes were videotaped. Gail had the dual role of being raped herself, as well as fetching and holding down her sisters when it was their turn to be raped. If the girls fell pregnant, the foetuses were aborted.

It becomes known that Gail carried full term at least four times though, and had two girls and at least two boys. We learn that Gail killed her two girls and although she mentions her boys, we never hear how many remaining children she has. At least three of Gail's children were conceived by her father. The oldest, Maxine, Gail only killed after the baby had been raped by Gail's father (Maxine's grandfather in other words) numerous times. Gail killed the second girl, Kylie, immediately after birth so as to ensure that the baby is not also raped by her father and his clients. Gail was found guilty of manslaughter for the death of Kylie, because the court felt there was insufficient evidence linking Kylie's death to the death of Maxine (page 23).

The information of *And all the children cried* is given primarily through the use of conversations between the two women. These conversations impart Gail's backstory as well as her given circumstances pertaining to status or class, spirituality, economics and politics and the law. It is also during the conversations with Myra that we get the best indicators pertaining to the character of Gail. The on-screen characters interact with Gail in scenes which serve as flash-backs to past events. As such they serve as a means to impart portions of the background story. The play ends with Gail being told to bring her things because the parole board's decision had come back and it seems she is being released on parole.

7.4 Analysis

I will start my analysis of this play by looking for indications of a psychiatric or psychological condition Gail might be suffering from. As I have mentioned a number of times, though, the different perspectives on maternal filicide overlap hugely and as such I will not demarcate the different fields as only belonging to a specific perspective during the course of my analysis.

The following speeches all mention the fact that Gail suffers from her "nerves". As Gail has a low

level of education (to be discussed later in this chapter), she might be referring to feelings of anxiety as "nerves".

> GAIL: I saw the trick cyclist. He said I wasn't mad, though I was bad with my nerves. He wrote - (*Reads*) - "no evidence of mental illness, nor of personality disorder". (page 24)
>
> GAIL: The nights are bad for my nerves. Days are better. [ ] It's a lot better than at first…My hair's come on a treat since I came here. [ ] At night, my nerves, they're terrible. (page 29)
>
> GAIL: My body just can't settle – it's like everything that's ever gone in here, starts coming out, from everywhere. My back passage, it's on fire. I'm sweating. [ ] My heart. It beats so fast. Can't get my breath. I'm going to choke. (page 29)
>
> GAIL: It never shuts down, my mind. They lock you up in here, shut everything down, then our mind keeps on. (page 41)
>
> GAIL: [ ] …my mind's exploding, voices, screaming and shouting, doors banging in my head. All the time, something I see, something you say, I remember…It sparks another thought. Last night I was thinking about what you said about the way people take us at face value. That began to get on my nerves. (page 42)

Stage directions that clearly point to Gail being anxious with the requisite physiological symptoms, are the following:

- *She sees shadows, dark and frightening.* (page 21*)*
- *Gail shudders. Body is feeling uncomfortable. Takes out her tobacco and papers, rolls a cigarette and tries to compose herself* .(page 23)
- *Her body is exhausted and overwhelmed. She looks like she might faint. She holds onto the chair and makes her way slowly to her cell where she is alone with flashbacks and body memories.* (page 27)
- *Shudders. Sighs.* (page 29)
- *Shudders.* (page 29)
- *She stands up, can't sit.* (page 29)
- *Screams, hyperventilates, has panic attack, then gets hold of herself.* (page 32)

- *Holds her mouth, retches as if being sick.* (page 35*)*

- *Drinks, then breathes deeply.* (page 36)

- *She holds head.* (page 36)

The authors tell us, through Gail, that she has been found by the psychiatrist to be mentally stable, although suffering from her "nerves". This would mean that either she does not suffer from any anxiety or stress disorder, or that she has been misdiagnosed by the psychiatrist. Sue et al (2010: 117) state that feeling anxious when faced with the potential of danger, is normal and in fact necessary for the fight or flight response to manifest physiologically, but when an individual experiences anxiety when no danger is imminent and the level of anxiety is such as to interfere with the person's everyday functioning, this would constitute an anxiety disorder. A panic attack is the experience by an individual of intense fear accompanied by physiological symptoms such as heart palpitations, shortness of breath, trembling and fear of losing control or dying (Sue et al, 2010: 117). Of the anxiety disorders, it is only generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) and panic disorder that is of interest to me as Gail manifests no symptomology of suffering from either phobia or obsessive compulsive disorder. GAD is characterised by persistent, acute anxiety about all aspects of life for most days for a period longer that six months. Physiological symptoms might include heart palpitations, trembling, sleep difficulties, poor concentration and muscle tension (Sue et al, 2010: 138). Panic disorder is characterised by recurrent, unexpected panic attacks with the individual anticipating and fearing another attack. Another disorder that warrants a closer look, is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Sue et al (2010: 177) write that in order to diagnose an individual with PTSD, he/she must have experienced trauma, relive the trauma experience through flashbacks, exhibit emotional withdrawal and avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma and physiological symptoms such as sleep disturbances, poor control over aggressive impulses and irritability.

Gail has been incarcerated for two years. She says that her hair has improved since her imprisonment, implying it was worse when she arrived two years ago (page 29). Severe stress and anxiety may lead to hair loss (Hall-Flavin, 2016). This would mean that she was anxious when she was jailed two years ago and is still anxious, even though she says it's gotten better. This extended period of anxiety would eliminate the possibility that her current anxiety might be due to the fact that she is awaiting the parole board's decision. Her anxiety, sleeping difficulties and somatoform symptoms could indicate that Gail suffers from generalised anxiety disorder (GAD). What worries me with this diagnoses, is that people with GAD are diagnosed as such because their excessive worries are usually unfounded worries. They worry about everyday things. This condition also often co-exist with a phobia (Sue et al, 2010: 139)

and there are no indications in *And all the children cried* that Gail suffers from any phobia. Her anxieties are not about trivia and seem to be triggered by the reliving, retelling, or remembering of past trauma. The literature on GAD does not mention trauma as being associated with GAD and as such I am eliminating GAD as a possible condition that Gail might be suffering from.

With regard to panic disorder, the text clearly states that Gail has a panic attack at least once (page 32). For this disorder to be diagnosed, the attacks need to be recurrent and she needs to consciously fear another attack. There are no indications in the text that she has or hasn't had other panic attacks. There are also no indications that she fears the onset of another panic attack. As a theatre practitioner, I am concerned with the fact that Gail has an onstage panic attack at all. A panic attack generally lasts ten minutes. It starts with a pre-attack (feeling uncomfortable and as if something is wrong physically), then goes into the actual attack (the stage of sheer terror) and ends with a slow decline which would leave the person feeling emotionally and physically drained and struggling to concentrate (How long do panic attacks last?, n.d.). I struggle to accept that the authors intended for an audience to watch a panic attack of ten minutes in a play that is about an hour long. Either the authors did not really mean for Gail to have a panic attack, but merely used the term to communicate to an actor the essence of what must be conveyed to the audience, or we are dealing with what some theatre practitioners call "real time" and "stage time".

Real time refers to the actual amount of time an action, cognition or emotion might take in real life and stage time refers to the condensed amount of time that same action, cognition or emotion might take during a performance. The idea behind this distinction is that actors go through actions and emotions in real time during rehearsals so as to get to the truth of them, but that an audience doesn't need to see the process but rather the product. The actor had already gone through the process which means it can be "gone through" at an accelerated pace during performance. The truth of the moment should still be present though. Immediately after Gail's panic attack, she continues her conversation with Myra. She is lucid and talks intelligently about her situation. Unlike earlier in the play, there are no stage directions indicating bodily discomfort or fatigue. It seems Gail skipped the slow decline stage of the panic attack. The single mention of a panic attack, the absence of a slow decline and the fact that the text asks of the actor to do it onstage, leads me to believe that Gail is not suffering from panic disorder but rather that the authors intended for the actor to understand that Gail has a particularly fearful moment.

Many of Gail's symptoms are characteristic of someone suffering from PTSD. She has anger management problems: "I go to anger management" (page 24). Her anxiety, heart palpitations, shortness of breath, choking, sweating and sleeping problems all correlate with PTSD symptomology.

She underwent tremendous trauma for an extended period of time and has flashbacks of the traumatic events. Research shows though, that most people with PTSD tend to want to avoid triggers associated with the trauma they experienced (Sue et al, 2010: 177) and this seems not to be the case with Gail. She actively encourages Myra to talk about her fears and candidly answers all the questions Myra asks her relating to her traumatic childhood and the subsequent murders of her children.

> GAIL: Never before. Never told anyone that before…Fancy that. These last few days all these things that keep coming into my head. It's like somebody set something off that's never going to stop. It's like, frightening…But as well, it's like, exciting. Do you know what I mean? I don't think I want it to stop. (page 36)

This seeking out of situations associated with the traumatic event is uncharacteristic of someone suffering from PTSD. Gail also does not manifest any emotional withdrawal or dissociation. On the contrary, it seems that she is quite sociable in jail. She says she "goes to work in the mornings. Have a good laugh" (page 29). She refers to discussions she has with Carol, another inmate, and admits to feeling affectionate towards Myra. She even gives Myra social advice: "I've been meaning to say, take my advice and lighten up – a bit of a sense of humour won't harm" (page 45). The fact that Gail actively and electively engages with issues pertaining to her sexual abuse and clearly engages with her world socially and emotionally, are incongruent with symptomology associated with PTSD and as such, I feel that Gail does not suffer from this condition either.

Psychosocial factors associated with maternal filicide are plentiful in *And all the children cried*. The most prominent of these, is the amount of intra-family abuse Gail was subjected to in her formative years.

When we meet Gail for the first time, the audience gets shown video footage of a fourteen-year old Gail who tells the court that her father started sexually abusing her when she was seven. The Barrister asks her: "Sexual intercourse, oral, anal sex, according to you, day in, day out. Is that correct?" (page 21). The Barrister repeats "day in, day out" twice after this, apparently with irony as he makes it clear that he doesn't believe Gail.

And all the children cried can be regarded as an indictment of societal neglect and indifference. The text is saturated with people who failed Gail and could therefore arguably be seen as complicit in the murder of her children. During the scene in which we see Gail as a fourteen-year old girl testifying in court of her father's abuse, we hear that her father is abusing her with her mother's consent. We hear that Gail told her teacher about the abuse who, in turn, told the welfare people. Gail tells the barrister that the welfare people thought she was lying, just as the barrister thinks she is lying now

(page 22). The problem seems to be that none of her brothers or sisters corroborate her story. It becomes clear later in the play that Gail's father also abused her brothers and sisters (page 26). No immediate explanation is given as to why the siblings, who are victims of the same perpetrator, would not also want the abuse to stop.

Gail clearly despises social workers. She refers to them as "bastard social workers" twice (pages 23, 25) and says: "Never been there for me. That lot. Always picking on me" (page 25). Gail tells Myra that some of the men her father brought home liked dressing up for the taping of the sexual abuse and didn't mind paying extra for it. Gail had to fetch the costumes from the costume hire place. She tells Myra that when Linda from the chip shop asked what the costumes were for and she answered that it's for her father, Linda would "know not to ask any more" (page 30). When Gail goes to the hospital as a fifteen-year old to give birth to a baby conceived by her father, the nurses in the hospital get told by Gail's mother that the father could be anyone of six men. Gail told the nurses that she didn't want the baby, but was told by them that "a baby brings joy, whatever the circumstances" (page 46). So instead of notifying the police that, at the very least a case of statutory rape needs to be investigated, they do nothing. Gail clearly tells the nurses she doesn't want the baby, but instead of calling social services to take the child into government care, they ignore her plea and condemn another child to a life of sexual abuse before being murdered. It seems many people were aware of the abuse Gail and her siblings underwent but did nothing about it. Gail tells Myra that she used to read magazines at the costume hire place as she waited for Janet, the manager of the shop, to get the costumes. She tells Myra that the reading of other's people lives only made her feel more cut off and that these people were just "another person who couldn't save us" (page 38).

As the play progresses, we hear of Gail's role as perpetrator. She fetched her sisters when told by her parents to do so and she held them down when they were raped by their father and other men. When Gail applied for parole her sisters wrote that they do not wish Gail to be released from jail because it is "important to those of us who suffered just as much as her to stand up for others who were cruelly treated as children" (page 25). Dawn, the one sister, asks Gail if killing Kylie made her feel "big, like him? Seeing kids with tears, seeing the scared little faces" (page 26). Gail admits to Myra that the thought of children's fear arouses her.

> GAIL: I think of the babies, the little ones. Oh, that's good, the little ones. I'm telling you things that I've never told myself…the babies, that's a good feeling, it's their faces, their fright I suppose. Makes me feel like I could do anything, anyone. That eases it, the fear…turns me on. Then I'll come…and oh God…some sleep. (page 30)

When Gail tells Myra that she killed Kylie in order to spare her a life of abuse, she says that Kylie was "as pure on the day she died as when I had her. He and I had never touched her [ ] Nothing of me or him got to her" (page 43). The passage that most clearly illustrates Gail's duplicate role of victim and perpetrator is the following:

> GAIL: I wouldn't want any misunderstanding. I killed Kylie and I did it to save her…Maxine was to save me. Killing him, not possible. (*She shouts*.) He rules the world, don't you get it..? That's what makes me dangerous. I look at someone, hear a voice, a shadow and it's him, always him. Always there. And because of what I've done it'll be locked inside me for ever. I need locking up me. We both know that. (page 47)

Immediately after this speech, we hear a voice coming over the tannoy (a type of public address system) telling Gail that the letter from the Governor has come and that she "might as well bring [her] things. We reckon its good news" (page 47). As Gail exits, the audience knows that this woman will most probably hurt children again. Yet the psychiatrist deemed her not dangerous to the public. Many people have ignored the abuse Gail and her siblings underwent and in doing so contributed to the deaths of Gail's two children. Gail frequently tried to speak out, but was told to "Shut up. Shut its mouth. All I've ever got, me. My teachers…doctors. Her…Him…My mouth. Shut…my mouth. They never meant shut it…They meant: Open it and shut up" (page 28).

Research has shown that perpetrators of maternal infanticide (a mother killing her child aged twenty-four hours to twelve months) are usually younger compared to mothers who kill older children (Spinelli, 2003: 24). This is definitely the case with *And all the children cried*. Gail's low level of education also concurs with research on maternal filicide. She tells Myra that the court found that she was "an ignorant and unfortunate woman ill equipped for parenting a young child" (page 23). The psychiatrist said she was "an unfortunate woman, operating at a level of below average intelligence whose natural wit has helped her survive without support" (page 24). Yet in the letter her sisters wrote the parole board they argue that "she is capable of great cruelty. She isn't stupid" (page 26). Gail tells Myra "I'm not having you think I don't think. I do. I work things out. I'm not stupid. No good at school, but not stupid" (page 36) and "I wasn't a bad reader, to say I was thick at school…" (page 37). On page 42 Gail says:

> Everyone has always thought of me as lowlife, as thick, common damaged goods. I'm not having it. Because it's not how I can be inside. You know I like that music you play. I like your words. And you're right. I do make decisions, I'm not just hopeless.

The picture that emerges is of a woman who functioned at a below average level academically, but

nonetheless was not intellectually impaired. The issue of Gail's mental ability seems rather to be an issue of accountability. The authors are telling us, through Myra's interactions with Gail, that although Gail might have perceived her filicidal actions as inevitable given her circumstances, she did in fact have choices. When Gail says, "unlucky me, I never had a chance, did I?" (page 32), Myra answers "I think I believe we all have a chance. I do not believe anybody is born bad. It is what we make of our circumstances" (page 32). An even more sinister tone enters later in the play when Myra hears that Gail did in fact kill Kylie.

> MYRA: Christ. So you did kill her. Well I'll be damned. So you killed her, fear made you kill her.
>
> GAIL: I decided. To kill her. That's got you thinking, hasn't it. I decided. You see, I wasn't hopeless. And I wasn't innocent either. That's why I decided to stop the campaigns, couldn't really let them make fools of themselves. I decided to accept the conviction for manslaughter.
>
> MYRA: (*Shocked*) Not murder.
>
> GAIL: Now I've told you before, darlin', I'm not stupid. (page 43)

On the next page:

> MYRA: [ ] They know I'm not dangerous. I'm an old woman. [ ] With you, it's not so clear. Anyway, you didn't get the publicity. Nobody has ever thought you were evil. They think you are thick.
>
> GAIL: That's me! As they say as pigshit!
>
> MYRA: You've got some people saying you'll do it again, some people think you've been rescued and redeemed by prison. A bit of education and a smatter of anger management and you'll know how to steer clear of trouble. But I don't know. (page 44)

Immediately after the exchange on page 43 Gail tells Myra to put on some music and she starts dancing to the tune of Gloria Gaynor's *I will survive*. The stage directions state "*that Gail's dancing becomes uninhibited, full of feeling and very beautiful Myra is uncomfortable. This is beyond her experience and her imagination*" (page 44).

I find these stage directions perplexing. The only explanation I can think of for this uninhibited and beautiful dance, is "the truth sets you free". On the next page Gail tells Myra that she feels better and that "talking, getting it off my chest. It does you good. I'll be alright" (page 44). The fictional Myra's

discomfort might then be due to the fact that the real Myra has never, until the day she died, admitted to the murders of the five children she was found guilty of, only ever admitting guilt to procuring the children for her partner, Ian, and watching the torture and murders. The remains of Keith Bennett, one of their victims, has also never been found despite letters his mother wrote Hindley begging her to tell the police where her son is buried (Wikipedia, 2016: "Moors Murders"). Myra tells Gail "confession might be good for your soul. I'm not sure about mine" (page 44). I therefore understand the (possible) sentiment the authors wanted to convey, but find the mechanism and especially the choice of song, very manipulative and unsatisfactory.

The picture of Gail that emerges is that of a manipulative woman who "plays" dumb when it suits her. For her to fool the judge, the psychiatrist and the groups campaigning for her release into thinking she is of under average intelligence when it seems clear she is not, would point to a cunning usually associated with high intelligence. This premeditated deceit could point to the existence of a personality disorder, but as there are no other indications in the text of this, I reject this possibility. It is my belief that Gail's apparent manipulation of society's perceptions of her accountability with regards her mental acuity, is a tool the authors employed to convey some people's belief that a person always has choices regardless of what cards life has dealt you. It seems clear that the authors do not want Gail to be seen as only a victim but also as a perpetrator who chose not to break the cycle of abuse as her sisters seem to have done. Barbara (Gail's sister) for instance tells Gail:

> What do you think our lives are like? We know what it did to you. It did the same to us. Me, every morning I get up at six. I decide. I'm not going to kill myself today. I'm going to put on mascara. Make myself a mask, and walk through the door into the day, doing my job, doing no more damage. (page 26)

Myra also tells Gail "You've had it hard, no-one can deny that. But your choices…that husband…neglecting your kids…There are women in here for protecting their kids" (page 36). These passages clearly argue that all people, regardless of their circumstances, are agents of choice. This use of Gail's mental ability as a political tool is thus incongruent with research on maternal filicide which found most young mothers who commit filicide to be uneducated and ignorant.

Another element that deviates from research on maternal filicide, is Gail's level of insight. Gail tells Myra twice that she wants answers:

> GAIL: Well, there's got to be answers…We don't just end up here. (page 33)

> GAIL: It's like I've said before, I want answers. (page 41)

The answers Gail is seeking, are to the question most research on maternal filicide is struggling with. Why do some women in certain situations kill their children and others in the same situation do not? The question is asked by Gail, but the authors are using her to ask the question society is battling with. This level of reflection is not usually associated with a child-killing mother as this would necessitate a high level of emotional intelligence and resilience which filicidal mothers do not usually have.

There is one reference to Gail engaging in previous criminality. Myra says "You've stolen" (page 28). She says this in the context of what women have to do because of the men in their lives. The reason for the theft(s) aside, a history of criminality is in concurrence with research on maternal filicide.

Gail went from an abusive childhood home to an abusive marriage. She says of her husband "that bastard…bruising me, just for looking at him. That's what a wife was for, bruising. Lost my front teeth on my wedding night" (page 24). Later she says: "I thought marriage was about hard work, broken jaws, babies and being got at all the time…Sex and family, sex and getting bashed, sex and marriage (*Sings*) go together like a horse and carriage" (page 34). This pattern of abuse is consistent with research on maternal filicide.

And all the children cried was written by self-proclaimed feminists. Sydney-Leigh (2014) starts her review (using an inaccurate publication date) of a performance of the play with "This brave play was written by feminist writer Judith Jones and journalist Beatrix Campbell in 2004. When I know I'm about to see a piece of feminist writing, I have preconceptions of how the women will be presented". It seems natural then, that the feminist perspective on maternal filicide be hugely observable in this text. I have already discussed the societal neglect of children as presented in the text which adheres to feminist thinking regarding the aetiology of abuse. Feminist thinking linking maternal filicide to feelings of powerlessness are also discernible in the text. Gail's sister, Dawn, asks Gail if killing Kylie made her "feel big, like him?" (page 26). Gail's admission that she can only get to sleep if she thinks of the little children's fear, because it made her feel like she could do anything, is another example of the powerless yielding power over the only less powerful thing than herself.

Men's ownership of women and the subsequent loss of power for women, are discussed at length by Myra and Gail. Gail refers to the fact that girls can't be saved because "they will get done anyway by their dads, their brothers. Grandads…Men. Think they own them. Right up to their insides. They'll always get us, right inside" (page 37). With reference to her children she says "I knew that my kids were going to be fucked the moment they fell out of me. Not a thing I could do about it" (page 39). These passages also illustrate the feminist perspective on gender roles being socialised in the family

and perpetuated through generations. Most of the accusations against men are made by Myra, though, see for instance:

> MYRA: Men…they shut us up all right!...scare us, hurt us…Keep us stupid, tell us who we can be, whether we are mad, who we can love…what we can wear, who we can hurt.(page 28)

There are many other passages pointing to both the women's hate of men, but the real feminist accusation comes once again from Myra:

> MYRA: Women are never 'innocent'. So what crimes are you guilty of? Manslaughter? Indecency? Transgressing the woman's natural role and instincts?
>
> GAIL: I'm guilty because I feel guilty. When I think about it, I've never ever felt anything else. (page 32)

This is the writers' ultimate accusation against society in general but men specifically. Sydney-Leigh (2014) wrote "read as a feminist piece, this play may appear man hating". It must be noted though, that Gail reserves most of her hate for her mother. "She was my mother…a woman, they are supposed to care for you…even after what I went through I knew that" (page 39). Gail fails to see that she became her mother when she allowed and even willed her father to rape her daughter, Maxine. This again reiterates the feminist view of perpetuated abuse.

The final aspect that will be discussed in this analysis, is the fact that Gail killed Kylie because "I had to do what only a mother would do. [ ] I had to save her from him" (page 42). She knew that her father would sexually abuse Kylie just as he had done with Maxine and her boys. The murder of Kylie seems to have been committed because of altruism then. She refers to Kylie as "the sweetest angel that ever lived, out of me, a golden, good, sweet baby love, I breathed love for her" (page 43). This in stark contrast to Maxine who is referred to as "it" and "that thing" and left to be abused by Gail's father. She explains the murders as follows: "I killed Kylie and I did it to save her…Maxine was to save me" (page 47).

Although the text clearly states that Maxine was conceived by Gail's father, I can find no reference to the identity of Kylie's father. If I assume that Kylie was not a product of incest, it could make sense that Gail thought her an innocent that needed to be killed in order to be saved from future abuse. This in contrast to Maxine who was apparently killed because she was a product of incest. What I do not understand then, is why the boys were not also killed. The text clearly states that Gail's boys were also conceived by her father. Gail also "stood by whilst the fellows carried on with them" (page 25). So she allowed them to live even though they were the product of her father's having "sprayed" her

"insides" (page 46) and she allowed them to be sexually abused. Both the reasons for killing her daughters seem not to have been applicable to her sons. Although this could correlate with the writers' feminist views of boys being raised differently from girls, there are still discrepancies. Gail says that she was told by her mother that girls are made for sex and as such she realised that girls can't be saved. She tells Myra that this is the reason she would fetch her younger sisters when ordered to do so, but ordered her younger brothers to remain in the room and be quiet. She even moved the cupboard in front of the door to keep them from harm, an act for which she was severely punished (page 27). Also in keeping with the view of gender specific socialisation, she tells Myra that "boys were brought up to be hard" (page 39). This does not, however, explain why Gail tried so hard to protect her brothers, but not her own sons.

7.5 Conclusion

In my view there are too many indications in *And all the children cried* that the authors are manipulating the character of Gail in order to convey a feminist message. More than the fact that I am unable to safely "pin" a specific diagnosis on Gail, I am of the opinion that she manifests symptomology of several filicidal characters simultaneously. Incongruences regarding cognitions, affect, behaviour and physiology would make it very difficult for an actor to embody the character of Gail coherently. The amount of stage directions asking the actor to fulfil a function the authors deem necessary at that stage in the play, rather than adhering to what might fit an actual filicidal character, are also problematic. I have already mentioned the awkward dance and can only hope that the choice of *I will survive*, was ironic. For an actor to "play": "*She sees shadows, dark and frightening. She knows she cannot look closely to make sense of the shadows*" (page 21) as well as "*This is beyond her experience and imagination*" (page 44) is near impossible. Another stage direction that reads more like prose than an actual stage direction, is "*She holds onto a chair and makes her way slowly to her cell where she is alone with flashbacks and body memories*" (page 27).

As theatre of advocacy *And all the children cried* seems to have been hugely successful. The reviews I have read all point to this. The play clearly succeeds in asking some very relevant and difficult questions regarding accountability for this crime. Spinelli (2003: 16) agrees with Jones and Campbell that the question "in a civilized and compassionate society, is to determine how to deal justly with those who kill their children and, more importantly, how to mobilize all of our resources to prevent these needless deaths in the future". The character of Gail, however, seem to be an amalgamation of different elements (case studies?) associated with maternal filicide and as such it is my view that an actor would have great difficulty in creating a psychologically coherent character adhering to the proven factors that could lead a mother to kill her children.

Chapter 8: *By the Bog of Cats*

8.1 Introduction

In chapter one I mentioned my reluctance to accept that a mother would kill her child to spite the father as Euripides's Medea had done. I have consequently learned that research on maternal filicide found that revenge filicide (sometimes referred to as Medea Syndrome) does in fact occur, albeit very rarely (Meyer & Oberman in Foster, 2007: 84). It seems fitting then that the last play discussed in this study be Irish playwright Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* (1999) which is a rewriting of the Medea myth.

Like the Greek original it is based on, *By the Bog of Cats* is a tragedy. Dedebas (2013: 249) argues that it is a "new form of tragedy." She writes that although Carr's tragedies draw from Greek tragedies not merely in plot but also in the use of concepts such as fate and destiny, they deviate from the latter in that they depict on-stage violence and destruction (Dedebas, 2013: 249). Walter Kaufman (in Dedebas, 2013: 251) defines tragedy as a

> form of literature that presents a symbolic action as performed by actors and moves into the centre immense human suffering, in such a way that brings to our minds our own forgotten and repressed sorrows as well as those of our kin and humanity, releasing us with some sense that suffering is universal.

Theatrical tragedy then, allows the audience to recognise and grieve for the suffering endured by not only the individual, but all humankind. Some critical papers written on *By the Bog of Cats* emphasise Carr's feminist view of her female protagonists as claiming agency whilst being trapped in a patriarchal environment domestically as well as politically (Dedebas, 2013; Gladwin, 2011). Feminist writers (as arguably should everyone) would indeed view the systemic emasculation (I use this word consciously) of women and children as tragic. Gladwin (2011: 388) argues that Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* laments the abandonment of Ireland's heritage in a consumer-oriented world and that the destruction of communal pasts is where the tragedy lies.

I argue that Carr's choice of tragedy as a vehicle for the maternal filicide motif is poignant in that it recognises the inevitability of certain biological and psychosocial factors as leaving a vulnerable mother with no apparent choice but to kill her child. According to Dedebas (2013: 256), "[q]uestions of determinism and the conflict between free will and destiny are prevalent in all Greek tragedies". I want to give the ethereal concepts of fate and destiny a more concrete form. If one accepts the psychosocial view of maternal filicide as hugely attributable to environmental factors, then fate and

destiny becomes the likelihood of intra-family violence perpetuating itself through generations. It becomes the likelihood that substance abuse is found to be linked to maternal filicide. It becomes the likelihood that genetic vulnerability could lead to the formation of a destructive personality disorder. It becomes the likelihood that a marginalised mother would more likely kill her offspring than a mother functioning within an accepting community. *By the Bog of Cats* (Carr, 1999) brings together the "deterministic universe in the Greek world and a similar sense of helplessness in contemporary Ireland (Dedebas, 2013: 256). I agree with Dedebas when she says "Carr offers a modern, sociological explanation of the psychological destruction of women that Greek drama invokes through its mythic sources" (2013: 259).

In the interest of brevity I will omit to reference Carr for the remainder of this chapter and the reader must conclude that all mentions of *By the Bog of Cats* (originally published in 1998) and all page numbers refer to Carr's text which was published in an anthology of her plays called *Marina Carr: Plays* in 1999. As was done in the previous chapters, I will start with a brief synopsis of the play, before commencing with the analysis.

8.2 Synopsis

By the Bog of Cats tells the story of Hester Swane. Hester's mother was a tinker which makes Hester a tinker. Gladwin (2011: 395) explains that tinkers are travellers and wanderers and considered marginalised people in Ireland and that "tinkers have been historically connected to the bogs because these open landscapes have been left to rot and the bog therefore provides them freedom from persecution". Hester's status as an outsider forms part of the given circumstances of the play. The other characters in the play are Carthage Kilbride (her lover of fourteen years, and father of her child, who left her for another woman), Josie Kilbride (their daughter aged seven), Mrs Kilbride (Carthage's mother who dislikes Hester intensely), Caroline Cassidy (young woman marrying Carthage), Monica Murray (Hester's neighbour and friend), Catwoman (old woman living on the bog who sees everything), Xavier Cassidy (Caroline's father and a wealthy member of the parish), The Ghost Fancier (a ghost who comes to collect Hester after her death), the ghost of Joseph Swane (Hester's brother whom she killed when he was eighteen), Father Willow (the parish priest) and three waiters at the wedding reception.

In the smallest possible nutshell, Hester is abandoned by the father of her child for another woman and it becomes clear that society expects of her to accept this rejection and go away. We learn that she did, in fact, agree to leave the Bog of Cats six months ago when she sold the house she, Carthage and Josie had lived in, to the new bride's farther, Xavier. This inciting incident forms the background

story of the play along with Hester's neglect and subsequent abandonment by her mother when she was seven, and the fact that she killed her brother, Joseph, many years ago. The murder and abandonment we only find out about as the play progresses. Hester changes her mind about leaving and announces "I was born on the Bog of Cats and on the Bog of Cats I'll end me days" (page 289). She becomes progressively more desperate to get Carthage back and ruins Carthage and Caroline's wedding reception by turning up in her own wedding dress which she never had the opportunity to wear as she and Carthage never married. She then burns down her house and Carthage's sheds, killing livestock in the process. The play ends with her committing suicide after having killed her daughter, seven year-old Josie Kilbride.

From the formalist perspective of text analysis, it is important to shed some light on the general locale of *By the Bog of Cats*. As the title suggests, the play is set on a bog. A bog is a "freshwater wetland of soft, spongy ground consisting mainly of partially decayed plant matter called peat and is oxygen-poor and nutrient-poor, making biodiversity much lower than in other wetland ecosystems" (National Geographic Society, 2016). Gladwin (2011: 388) writes that bogs, in literature through the ages, have often functioned as a wasteland for the dispossessed and marginalised and as such have become a metaphor for "collective trauma". He cites Remco as referring to the characteristic brown water that flows out of bogs as "black primordial goo" and "a black soup – almost like a metaphor for the subconscious" (Gladwin, 2011: 387). As the formation of bogs take centuries, they are viewed as ancient "depositories of history" (Gladwin, 2011: 390). Gladwin (2011: 391) goes so far as to say that bogs are often seen as "living and breathing creatures, especially in terms of a 'shifting' bog, which after heavy rains can move like a giant glacier". Gladwin (2011: 390) also writes of bogs as being associated with the supernatural world, with folklore referring to shapeshifting creatures and water sprites intent on dragging "weary travellers toward a watery death". The supernatural world, just like the tinkers, has always functioned "on the edges of society" (Gladwin, 2011: 390). It seems clear then, that Carr's choice of general locale is specific and central to the play. For the purposes of this study, though, it is sufficient to know that for most people, a bog is a place you stay at if you have no alternative.

8.3 Analysis

Dedebas refers to Hester as having a nervous breakdown (2013: 252, 253) and also writes of Hester's "insanity" twice in her article (2013: 252, 256). In keeping with my modus operandi thus far, I will start my text analysis of *By the Bog of Cats* by searching for manifestations of possible psychiatric and psychological conditions which Hester might be suffering from. As stated before, the extensive overlapping of the different perspectives on maternal filicide necessitates a more fluid analysis of the

text and as such I will not categorise my analysis.

A nervous breakdown (also called a mental breakdown) is a laymen's term used to describe "a time-limited and acute phase of a disorder that is present during depression and anxiety" (Nervous Breakdown - Symptoms, Causes, Treatment, 2015). There is, however, no definition in any medical diagnostic system of the terms "nervous breakdown" or "mental breakdown". Rapport, Todd, Lumley, & Fisicaro, (1998: 250) found that "the closest DSM-IV diagnostic category to nervous breakdown is Adjustment Disorder with Mixed Anxiety and Depressed Mood". An adjustment disorder is defined as "a group of conditions that can occur when you have difficulty coping with a stressful life event" (Cirino, 2016). Common characteristics of adjustment disorder (AD) are depression, anxiety and dissociation and these must manifest within three months of the stressor appearing in the person's life. Symptoms may not last longer than six months after the stressor have ceased to exist for AD to be diagnosed. Depressive symptoms might include suicide ideation, insomnia or hypersomnia, feeling sad, loss of interest in everyday life, weight changes and feelings of hopelessness. Anxiety manifests in racing thoughts, inability to concentrate and somatic symptoms such as difficulty breathing, trembling and a heart palpitations (Bressert, 2016).

There are clear indications in the text that Hester is under severe stress due to a major life event. Carthage Kilbride, the father of her seven year-old daughter, has left her for a much younger and seemingly socially more acceptable woman after a fourteen year relationship and she has to vacate her house. Hester exhibits depressive and dissociation symptoms from the moment we meet her and these symptoms worsen as the play progresses. These will be discussed at more length later in this section. What we cannot know, due to the fact that she dies at the end of the play, is if her symptoms would have ceased after six months of being removed from the stressor.

There also seems to be indications in the text that at least some of her symptoms were present prior to Carthage abandoning her. Hester's drinking problem started a long time ago (see pages 273, 288, 290 and 294) and she has been walking the bog at nights for many years, clearly indicative of insomnia. Another aspect of Hester's behaviour which does not correlate with adjustment disorder, is her impulsivity and aggression. Impulsivity can be defined as "a predisposition toward rapid, unplanned reactions to internal or external stimuli without regard to the negative consequences of these reactions to the impulsive individual or to others" (Moeller, Barratt, Dougherty, Schmitz & Swann, 2001: 1784). There are indications in the text that her aggression and impulsivity have also been presenting for longer than the few months since Carthage has left her (see pages 272, 277, 312 and 318).

Impulsivity is closely associated with borderline personality disorder (BPD) as is aggression, feelings of victimisation, identity disturbance and suicidality (Moeller et al, 2001: 1785, 1786) – all of which are manifested by Hester. As Carthage tells Hester "I've watched ya now for the best part of fourteen years and I can't say for sure I know the first thing about ya" (page 288). A study done by Preißler, Dziobek, Ritter, Heekeren and Roepke (2010: 1, 2) found the following factors to be present in people diagnosed with BPD: fluctuating self-image, disturbed relatedness (not being able to 'read' other people), an inability to regulate affect, aggression, dysthymia (mild depression), and social isolation. BPD seems to have a hereditary and environmental component and Friedel (2012) writes that "a genetic predisposition for developing the disorder is necessary, and environmental factors may increase the risk but are not essential". There are indications in the text that Hester's mother also suffered from, possibly, BPD. There are numerous indications of childhood trauma, which have been associated with the formation of personality disorders. The most prominent of Hester's symptoms is her fear of abandonment. All of these factors lead me to believe that Hester suffered from BPD, rather than adjustment disorder as initially also considered.

The first factor associated with BPD which I will discuss in relation to Hester, is aggression and hostility. Almost all the characters in the text refer to Hester's aggression at one time or another. Monica, her neighbour and friend, says to Hester, "you're angry now and not thinking straight" (page 269). Hester threatens to "knock your little turf house down" and that she'll "bring down diesel, burn ya out" (page 272) when she talks to the Catwoman. Mrs Kilbride calls her "dangerous wrongheaded" (page 277) and refers to Hester's "savage tinker eye" that she turns on people "to frighten them" (page 312). When Caroline, Carthage's young bride, tells Hester that she is not afraid of her, Hester replies "ya should be. I'm afraid of meself" (page 283) and that Caroline must know that there are

> two Hester Swanes, one that is decent and very fond of ya despite your callow treatment of me. And the other Hester, well she could slide a knife down your face, carve ya up and not bat an eyelid (*Grabs her hair suddenly and viciously*). (page 285)

When Caroline tells Hester that she had better vacate the house before Xavier, her (Caroline's) father, returns because Hester doesn't know his temper, Hester replies "And you don't know mine" (page 296). Carthage refers to Hester's arrival (in a wedding dress) at his and Caroline's wedding reception as "a display of hatred" towards him (page 315). It becomes clear through the course of the play that she had killed her brother, Joseph, many years ago by slitting his throat from behind. She burns down the house she was ordered to leave as well as over forty calves that she had locked in the shed. After this deed she says "will somewan not come and save me from meself before I go and do worse" (page 317). She is asking for help, but in Carr's brilliance she has left Hester alone on stage so this plea

falls not even on deaf ears, but on no ears. Hester does tell Carthage on page 334 that she had only ever wanted someone to understand her, and not judge her. At the end of the play, she first kills her daughter, Josie, and then herself. The ghost of Joseph asks Hester at one stage “what’re ya so angry about?” (page 318) and Hester tells him “I’ll slit your throat again if ya stood here in front of me in flesh and bone” (page 318). There are thus abundant evidence of Hester’s aggression and hostility towards other people.

Hester’s primary anger seems to be directed towards her mother for abandoning her at age seven with the lie that she will return one day. Hester says that if her mother ever returned she would spit in her face, hit her and cut her with a knife (page 318). Josie Swane, Hester’s mother, might be responsible for Hester’s anger in more ways than one, though. It seems Josie also had anger management problems which points to a hereditary element in Hester’s behaviour. Correlations between Hester and her mother’s behaviour will be discussed in more detail later in this section.

Hester acts impulsively. Much of her reactions to internal or external stimuli are spontaneous and without cognition of possible negative consequences to either herself or those around her. She kills her brother, Joseph, because he talked about their mother. She burns down the house and sheds on a whim. She oscillates between threatening and insulting Carthage and pleading with him not to leave her. She signed the house over to Xavier, Caroline’s father, over six months ago (and was paid for it) and suddenly changes her mind saying “bits of paper, writin’, means nothin’, can as aisy be unsigned” (page 283). The whole first Act of the play she begs to be allowed to stay in the house, but after having burnt it down, she says she “never liked that house anyway” (page 322). Then she begs Carthage to buy her another house and later she asks to be allowed to stay in the caravan on the bog (page 332). She stopped drinking the night Carthage left her and started drinking again without considering the consequences. When she tells Josie to go play by herself she instructs the girl to give her dolls a bath and a haircut. When Josie points out that Hester has always said that she shouldn’t cut her dolls’ hair Hester says “well, now I’m sayin’ ya can, alright” (page 291). Hester also turns up at Carthage and Caroline’s reception wearing the unused wedding dress Carthage had given her nine years ago. This does not seem to be a premeditated act and the fact that she makes a mockery of herself and everyone else seems not to have occurred to her. More importantly, she does it in front of her daughter, again not considering the psychological damage she might be inflicting on her only child.

She tells Josie that the Catwoman had put a curse on her (Josie) whereby if she ever left Hester, she will die. Two speeches later she apologises to Josie for frightening her and tells her it is not true (page 327). Again, her volatile behaviour leaves everyone, and especially Josie, traumatised. Carthage says

of his decision to leave her that he wants “peace, just peace” (page 291). Xavier tells Carthage at the end that Hester is “beyond reasonin’ with” (page 332). Hester says it best though when she says “how does anywan know why they done anythin’? (page 333). Hester led a chaotic life where she acted impulsively on environmental and emotional cues.

A further indicator of BPD is suicidality. Hester’s first remark about death being a better option than the life she is currently leading, is already on page three of the play. Monica comments on Hester’s wandering around outside in the extreme cold, saying “ya’ll catch your death in this weather” and Hester replies “swear the age of ice has returned. Wouldn’t ya almost wish if it had. Do away with us all like the dinosaurs” (page 267). After Hester burns down the house and sheds Xavier confronts her. He has a shotgun with him, but there are no indications in the text that he intends to use it against Hester. It is Hester who puts her mouth over the barrel of the shotgun and urges Xavier to pull the trigger saying “g’wan shoot! Blow me away! Save me the bother meself” (page 331). Before Xavier can do anything Hester goes for the trigger herself and only after a struggle does Xavier succeed in getting the gun away from her. Hester ultimately succeeds in ending her life by cutting out her own heart, but not before she slits her daughter’s throat.

There also seem to be clear indications that Hester suffers from dysthymia. Her insomnia is well known to all that live on the bog. Monica tells Hester to “stop this broodin’” (page 268). Negative thoughts are characteristic of depression. Hester’s neglect of Josie could therefore be due to dysthymia. A depressed person loses interest in everyday activities. Mrs Kilbride refers to Hester as “a sad lost little woman” (page 313). The ghost of Hester’s dead brother, Joseph, describes the land of the dead as “darkness the whole time” and that he feels lonely constantly (page 301). When Hester tells the ghost of Joseph that she has been feeling like a ghost for a long time (page 321), she could in fact be telling him that she has been living in darkness and isolation for a long time. This aptly describes a depressive mood.

Hester hears the ghost of her brother and sees and hears the Ghost Fancier. Even though it might not be Carr’s intention, I argue that an actress in search of symptomology associated with certain proven conditions regarding maternal filicide, be allowed to interpret these otherworldly encounters as hallucinations and as such as possible manifestations of dissociation. Dissociation is defined as an impaired state of awareness that “limits or alters one's sense of identity, memory or consciousness” (Steinberg, 2008). Hallucinations are not usually characteristic of someone suffering from dissociation. Moskowitz and Corstens (2007) however, argue that “hallucinations should be considered a dissociative experience and not a psychotic symptom”. If one agrees with this assertion, Hester’s encounters with the two ghosts can be viewed as hallucinations associated with dissociation.

There are other indications in the text that she dissociates from reality. She tells the Ghost Fancier that even though he is the first ghost she sees she has “felt what [she] thought were things from some other world” (page 265).

Hester further clearly feels victimised by almost all the people she is surrounded by. She accuses Monica, her friend, of siding with the rest of the parish in trying to run her off the bog: “Thinks yees all Hester Swane with her tinker blood is getting’ no more than she deserves” (page 268). She also tells the Catwoman that it wouldn’t matter if she stays or leaves because she has a curse on her head (page 276). This abdication of responsibility is characteristic of someone who feels victimised. She tells Xavier that God is punishing her because she hadn’t acted against Xavier before his son, James, had died (page 293). In this scene she implies that Xavier had sexually abused his children and later she accuses him of murdering James. She says that it is because she knows this that Xavier wants her gone. Except for Hester’s accusations, I can find no indications in the text of any of this ever happening. Xavier tells Hester: “Not everywan sees the world through your troubled eyes. There’s such a thing as a father lovin’ his daughter as a father should, no more, no less, somethin’ you have never known” (page 295).

Another indication of Hester’s perceived victimhood, is her accusation that Caroline stole her house, her husband and her daughter (page 283) even though it becomes clear through the course of the play that Carthage had left her because of her drinking, unruliness and neglect of Josie. Hester even admits that she had wanted to leave Carthage nine years ago and only stayed because he begged her to. She accuses Carthage of trying to “cancel” her “out” (page 287) whereas he is merely asking her to move out of the house that she had sold them six months earlier. Other excessive terms she uses for what Carthage is doing “to her”, include: “wipe out” (page 287), “discarded” (page 313), “flung on the ashpit” (page 313), “eradicate” (page 315), “make out I never existed” (page 315) and “flung in a bog hole like a bag of newborn pups” (page 317). By equating herself to a newly born pup, she claims helplessness and innocence. When Josie corrects her mother for calling her by the wrong surname, Hester tells her “I suppose you’re ashamed of me too” (page 292). When Hester turns up at the wedding reception in a wedding dress she tells the gathered people “yees all just sit there glarin’ as if I’m the guilty wan” (page 312). She disrupts someone else’s wedding and still claims victimhood. She maintains her innocence when she says “I’ve done nothin’ again’ any of yees. I’m just bein’ who I am” (page 313). She says she was bullied and coerced (page 293) into selling her house. When she meets the ghost of Joseph she tells him that he won’t be getting an apology from her for killing him.

> HESTER: If it wasn’t for you, me and Carthage’d still be together!

> JOSEPH: So it's my fault ya killed me, that what you're sayin'?
>
> HESTER: He took your money after we killed ya –
>
> JOSEPH: To my memory Carthage did nothin' only look on. I think he was as shocked as I was when ya came at me with the fishin' knife – (page 319)

Hester, even in speaking to a ghost, denies the fact that she had acted alone in killing her brother. More than that, she would go so far as to blame the demise of her relationship on a ghost rather than on herself. She also tells the ghost of Joseph that she has a daughter but that "they're tryin' to take her from me" (page 319) where the truth is that no-one was trying to separate them until Hester started acting more aggressive than usual by ruining the wedding reception.

Hester's sense of victimisation can be traced back even to before her mother left her. She tells Monica that Josie Swane used to be asked to sing at all the parish's functions and that she accompanied her mother on these outings. They were treated like outsiders; given a "bag of food and a half a crown and walked off the premises, for fear we'd steal somethin'" (page 324). Hester says it never seemed to bother her mother but that it angered her and still does. This does seem like bigoted behaviour on the part of society, but if one takes into account that Josie Swane was a substance abusing, aggressive, neglectful mother who never thanked anyone for trying to do good by Hester (the child) it could be argued that the community did not, in fact, act unfairly towards Josie. In the last scene, Josie walks in on her mother as she is about to slit her own throat. Hester tells Josie that she is going away and that Josie cannot come with her. Josie objects to this arrangement and Hester slits Josie's throat and says "it's because ya wanted to come, Josie" (page 339). I am of the opinion (which will be discussed further later in this section) that Hester inadvertently acted in an altruistic manner, but taken at face value, one could argue that even Josie's murder is blamed on Josie. Just like Joseph's murder was blamed on Joseph.

Hester's fear of abandonment is palpable. It seems evident that this fear stems from the very real abandonment she experienced as a seven year-old child when her mother left her. The abandonment was recurring when her mother failed to return as she had promised. In keeping with research on childhood trauma, Hester assimilated the rejection as proof of wrongdoing on her part, ironically assuming responsibility for the one thing in her life for which she should not have to account for. Carthage also abandoned her and in between threatening him with the possibility of losing Josie, she begs him to take her back:

> HESTER: Tell me what to do, Carthage, and I'll do it, anythin' for you to come back.

> CARTHAGE: Just stop, will ya –
>
> HESTER: Anythin', Carthage, anythin', and I'll do it if it's in me power. (page 289)

Near the end of the play she accuses Josie of also wanting to abandon her (Josie merely said that she wants to go with her father and Caroline to the sea for five days).

> HESTER: [ ] he plans to take ya off of me. I suppose ya'd like that too.
>
> JOSIE: (*still with ears covered*) I said I'm not listenin'!
>
> HESTER: You'll listen to me, Josie Swane, and you listen well. Another that had your name walked away from me. Your perfect daddy walked away from me. And you'll walk from me too. All me life people have walked away without a word of explanation. Well, I want to tell ya somethin', Josie, if you lave me ya'll die. (page 326)

Hester tells Josie many more times that she has to stay with her and that she may never leave her. In the next scene Carthage tells Hester that he is taking custody of Josie because she has proven herself an unfit mother but that she will be allowed to visit Josie (page 335). When he leaves she goes into the caravan to fetch a knife with which to cut her own throat. Almost immediately after she made Josie promise to never leave her, she plans on leaving the child.

Indications that Hester suffers from impaired relatedness are also identifiable in the play. When she tells Monica about the special bond between herself and Carthage, Monica says "that's all in your own head, the man cares nothin' for ya" (page 269). Even after Caroline and Carthage had gotten married, she went to the reception in a wedding dress and begged him, in front of everyone, to go away with her (page 313). She clearly misread Carthage's feelings towards her.

Hester seems to have a fluctuating self-image (identity disturbance). She insists on being proud of her tinker status and yet accuses Josie of feeling ashamed of her (page 292), implying that there might be a reason for this shame. She takes full credit for Carthage's success financially and claims she made him into the man he has become (pages 284, 288), yet feels judged by him. Implicit, again, is the feeling that she judges herself the harshest. She actually admits to this near the end of the play when she tells Carthage "however harshly ya judged me, I judged meself harsher" (page 334). Hester expresses notions of superiority, all the while hiding a thinly disguised belief that she is unworthy of love and admiration. She oscillates between being the victim, the angry child, the aggressor, the seductress and the advice-giving rescuer. All of these shifts can best be summed up as a constant oscillation between pushing people away and begging for intimate connections.

As mentioned earlier, research shows that people suffering from BPD seem to have a genetic vulnerability which, in conjunction with environmental factors, led to the formation of this personality disorder. Hester's mother, Josie Swane, is reported as sharing many character traits with her daughter. Hester refers to her mother (only near the end of the play) as "a rancorous hulk with a vicious whiskey temper" (page 320) and Catwoman refers to Josie Swane as "bitter and mean" (page 275) and that Hester should feel lucky that her mother had left her (page 276). Xavier tells Hester that Josie Swane once bit off the nose of a women for daring to look at her man (page 295) and that the only thing Hester learnt from her mother was how to use a knife (page 294). He also tells Hester "you're as mad as your mother and she was a lunatic" (page 329). Even good natured Monica says that Josie Swane had "somethin' cold and dead about her" (page 323). Josie was clearly an aggressive, hostile and violent person.

Towards the end of the play Hester tells Monica: "And yes, there's things about me yees never understood and makes yees afraid and yees are right for other things goes through my veins besides blood that I've fought so hard to keep wraps on" (page 325). She also tells Xavier that she recognises the darkness within him for it mirrors her own (page 329) and tells Carthage that "somethin' evil moved in on me blood" (page 333) the day she killed her brother. Placing the darkness within herself and specifically as residing in her blood, emphasises Hester's bloodline as being, in part, responsible for her actions. Catwoman refers to Josie Swane's habit of "pausin'" (page 275). There are also numerous mentions of Josie's exceptional singing ability and that she changed as a person whilst singing. Monica for instance tells Hester: "Josie Swane, somethin' cold and dead about her except when she sang and then I declare ya'd fall in love with her" (page 323). Josie's daydreaming and singing could be considered manifestations of dissociation as both allowed her extended periods of escape from reality.

It seems Hester also inherited her mother's thirst for alcohol. Xavier tells Hester that Josie used to leave her to go drinking for days on end (page 294) and Catwoman tells Hester "I need mice the way you need whiskey" (page 273). Hester tells Carthage that she hasn't had a drink since his departure, implying that her drinking was one of the reasons he had left her (page 288). This is verified at the end of the play when he accuses her of "sittin' at the kitchen table and drinkin' till all hours" (page 334) when they were still together. In the middle of the play Hester starts drinking again and doesn't stop until the end of the play. When Carthage threatens to have Hester declared an unfit mother, he says that he need only mention her drinking and "night roamin' or the way ya sleep in that dirty auld caravan and lave Josie alone in the house" (page 290) for the courts to award him full custody of Josie. It seems both mother and daughter abused alcohol to the extent of it interfering in normal functioning.

Two more things Hester seemingly inherited from her mother, are her insomnia (both women roamed the bog at night) and her tendency to neglect her daughter, whom she claims to love very much. Xavier and Catwoman tell Hester that her mother, Josie, was guilty of serious neglect, having chained Hester to the caravan dressed in only a nappy and not feeding her (page 275, 294, 295). Carthage accuses Hester of neglecting their daughter by leaving her unattended during the nights while she roams the bog. Hester's drinking would also have resulted in her neglecting her child. We meet Josie for the first time in Act 1 scene 2. It is a bitterly cold morning, yet Josie is walking around outside barefooted. Josie's second line in the play (apart from her song) is "did ya see me Mam, did ya?" (page 270) and later in the same scene she says "I wish if me Mam'd come soon" (page 280). When Carthage asks her later where Hester is, she replies "isn't she always on the bog?" (page 282) It is Mrs Kilbride that gives Josie breakfast and plays a game of cards with her. Hester only meets up with Josie in Act 1 scene 6, near the middle of the play and then quickly sends her away to go play by herself. Mrs Kilbride tells Carthage a number of times that Hester is not looking after Josie properly and Monica says to Hester: "The child, Hester, ya have to pull yourself together for her, you're goin to have to stop this broodin'" (page 268). Hester might not purposefully be neglecting Josie, but she is so invested in her own needs that she inadvertently neglects Josie's. Not once, during the whole play, does she put Josie's needs before her own. Josie has to beg to be allowed to go to her father's wedding. She hardly sees her mother, yet gets told to go play on her own when the two do meet. She has to wear her communion dress to the wedding because she has "grown out of all [her] other dresses" (page 296). Carthage says to Caroline that "Josie is the wan I worry about. [ ] Hettie should've got her a proper dress" (page 302) and Mrs Kilbride says of Josie that "she's ruined" (page 308). This last statement might also imply that, if Josie were to live, she would continue the Swane tradition of unsavoury behaviour, or more specifically, that she might be carrying the gene that have already condemned two generations to destructive lives.

I have mentioned that I view Josie's murder as an act of altruism on the part of Hester, and I maintain that Hester killed Josie to spare her a life of longing for her mother. However, Josie would not have had to long for her mother if Hester was not intent on killing herself. So even Josie's death, albeit to save her a life of misery, was because Hester's needs were paramount.

Josie Swane abandoned her daughter when Hester was seven, telling her that she will one day return for her. Hester explains that it is because she is waiting for her mother's return that she can never leave the bog (page 316). If one acknowledges the bog as a metaphor for a depository of memories as mentioned earlier, the bog becomes a person's psyche. A psyche that could never forget the childhood trauma that it suffered. Hester became a victim of biological and environmental factors, chaining her to the past (the bog) and preordaining the future, for even though Hester tells Joseph that

"there isn't anything in this wide world Josie [referring to her daughter] could do that'd make me walk away from her" (page 319), she decides to commit suicide that very evening, thus intending to do exactly that. Hester tells Josie that she is saying goodbye and that Josie will never see her again. She tells Josie that she cannot give her all the opportunities that Caroline and Carthage can, but Josie replies that if Hester leaves, she'd be "watchin' for [her] all the time 'long the Bog of Cats"; she'd be "hopin' and prayin'" for her to return (page 338). Hester realises that she cannot condemn her daughter to the same life she had led and decides to kill her before committing suicide.

I therefore reiterate that Hester's filicidal act was not performed as an act of revenge against Carthage, even though he would have taken Josie away from her. Unlike Medea, Hester's murder of Josie can be considered an act of altruism, whereby sparing Josie the life that she herself had led: a damaged life because of being abandoned by the one person who should love and protect you forever. Carr uses the young, innocent Caroline to tell us what a mother's role should be when she promises Hester that she will take good care of Josie whenever the child visits them: "I won't let her out of my sight – I'll go everywhere with her – protect her from things. That's all" (page 336).

Carr might be saying that if only Josie Swane and Hester had stayed off the bog (where the bog symbolises the biological and environmental past that imprisons them) and given attention to the little person in front of them, all might have ended differently. That's all. This would have been beyond the abilities of someone who suffers from BPD, as indeed I conclude Hester did.

Psychosocial factors associated with maternal filicide in *By the Bog of Cats* are numerous. I have written at length of the substance abuse by both Hester and her mother. I have mentioned the fact that the Swanes were tinkers and that they were seen as low-class and thus marginalised by society. This being said, though, it must be noted that Hester, although marginalised, was not left to raise her child on her own. Mrs Kilbride, although seemingly resentfully, takes care of Josie and Monica asks Hester if she must take Josie for her breakfast (page 268). It seems clear that Carthage loves Josie immensely and is actively involved in her life. The only one who seems to send Josie away to go play on her own, is Hester (page 287, 291). Hester seems not to have been gainfully employed as Mrs Kilbride states that she is "livin' off of handouts from my son that she flitters away on whiskey and cigars" (page 280). There are no indications that she had financial problems though. Hester does have a history of criminal behaviour in that she killed her brother Joseph and stole his money. She started her affair with Carthage when he was sixteen years old (herself being ten years older). Although not strictly against the law, most clinicians would be concerned about a romantic relationship between a teenager and an adult, calling it unethical at least.

It has been established that Hester experienced substantial childhood trauma even prior to her mother abandoning her. She was neglected and chained to their caravan and members of their society regularly had to feed and clothe her and give her shelter for the nights. She has conflicting memories of her mother and asks Catwoman to tell her about Josie "for what I remember doesn't add up" (page 274). When Catwoman tells her that Josie neglected her as a baby, Hester does not believe her (page 276) and when Xavier tells her the same thing, but in a less sympathetic tone, she yells "lies! All lies!" (page 295) She even asks the ghost of Joseph what her mother was like. It seems important to Hester to protect the romanticised picture she has of her mother. Yet she also tells the ghost of Joseph that her mother had a whiskey temper. One could interpret the reference to Josie's temper and the numerous references to her violence towards other adults as indicative of the possibility that Hester was also physically abused. This would be pure speculation however, as there are no other indications in the text that Hester was physically abused. Nor are there any indications that Hester is abusing her child physically although she also acts violently towards other adults. There are also no indications in the text that Carthage and Hester had a physically abusive relationship prior to their break-up. Hester mentions that she was sent away to Industrial School (page 324) but only dreamt of coming back to the Bog of Cats to await her mother's return. It seems then, that she had an education at least to the same extent as the other people living on the bog. Unlike researched cases of maternal filicide where attempts at societal intervention were actively sought, Hester shuns all attempts of this small community to help her.

It seems then, that the only psychosocial factors pertaining to maternal filicide present in *By the Bog of Cats* are Hester's childhood trauma, her marginalised status as a tinker, previous criminality and substance abuse. This, coupled with a possible hereditary vulnerability towards borderline personality disorder, would be enough for this personality disorder to develop.

Looking at *By the Bog of Cats* from the child development perspectives, it seems clear that Hester did not form a secure attachment to her mother. She might romanticise her seven years of having a mother because her id[18] needs it to function, but the neglect and ultimate abandonment suffered at the hands of her only caregiver, traumatised her. The "neediness" (as manifested in her severe fear of abandonment) associated with BPD is indicative of a sufferer's inability to establish secure attachments.

Adhering to the feminist perspective of maternal filicide, *By the Bog of Cats* places Hester on the fringes of society. There is a constant narrative of "us" (the Swanes) and "them" (the rest) in the text.

[18] "The id is the personality component that works to satisfy basic urges, needs and desires and operates based on the pleasure principle, which demands immediate gratification of needs" (Cherry, 2016).

Hester is a tinker and as such is seen as “thick and stubborn and dangerous wrongheaded and backwards to top it all” (page 277) as Mrs Kilbride tells Josie (Hester’s daughter). In the same scene Mrs Kilbride tells Josie four times that she is a bastard and that Mrs Kilbride will “batter [her] into the semblance of legitimacy yet” (page 281). Mrs Kilbride goes so far as to tell her she’s a Swane, not a Kilbride, although it becomes clear through the course of the play that Josie took her father’s surname. Josie is being socialised to believe that she is a second rate citizen unworthy of being loved, just as her mother had been. This tragedy of history repeating itself unfolds over a seemingly innocuous game of cards. Josie is being emotionally abused whilst getting much needed attention. Mrs Kilbride even gives her sweets. This unstable environment, coupled with Hester’s neglect and conditional love, could result in Josie also feeling confused and insecure regarding her position in her family as well as in the broader community.

9.4 Conclusion

I agree with Dedebas (2013: 261) when she says “the play ends with two dead people, who would face lives of victimization otherwise”. If indeed Hester and her mother suffered from BPD as I suggest, and if indeed this personality disorder forms because of genetic as well as environmental factors as research suggests, Josie would in all likelihood also have developed this disorder. The same blood runs through her veins and she is exposed to similar environmental factors as her mother and grandmother were. This then, for me, is where the tragedy of Marina Carr’s *By the Bog of Cats* lies. Fulford (1996) writes that personality disorders are “highly resistant to change” and that “damage limitation, by changing the environment not the patient, is all that medicine can hope to achieve”. Thus, if Hester had lived in a community that recognised that she suffered from a psychological condition and was not merely being contrary, informed intervention might possibly have staved off the filicide/suicide.

Catwoman tells Hester at the beginning of the play that there’s a curse on her, Hester, and that if she doesn’t leave the Bog of Cats, she’d be dead by the evening. Hester replies that, with a curse like that over her head, it wouldn’t matter if she stayed or went. This statement by Hester clearly illustrates the lack of agency that she experiences. Catwoman replies “there’s ways round curses. Curses only have the power you allow them” (page 276). Hester never escaped the curse, though. It is my belief that her genetic predisposition coupled with environmental factors, resulted in the formation of borderline personality disorder and that she killed Josie in act of altruism. This would fit with research on maternal filicide which found that this specific personality disorder often presents in cases of maternal filicide/suicide. Other psychosocial factors that were identified in the text, includes Hester’s status as a tinker which led to her marginalisation, her substance abuse and her previous criminality.

Dedebas (2013: 263) argues that Hester achieved agency through the use of extreme violence and that she will, in death, finally be heard. I disagree. Hester is dead. As is Josie. As the ghost of Joseph tells us, death is darkness and silence (page 299, 301).

Chapter 9: Summary, conclusion and possible future research

9.1 Summary

At the start of this study I explained how I, as an actor, an acting teacher, a student of psychology and a mother, decided on this research topic. I acknowledged the fact that, as a theatre practitioner working in the Afrikaans festival circuit, I seldom have the time to do proper research pertaining to whichever play(s) I might be busy with. I also found that this lack of research can be seen in some of the newly written (unpublished) texts that I have performed in over the course of twenty years. This led me to question whether I will, after having done research on maternal filicide, find the empirically proven factors associated with this crime, present in selected plays.

A brief literary review of maternal filicide in literature through the ages revealed three distinct explanations as to why writers feel compelled to write about this complex crime. The first reason posited was the use of filicidal mothers in literature to represent all that is immoral in a mainly moral society. The murdering mother becomes the scapegoat on which all that should be avoided, is heaped. This type of literature has as its aim to steer the society for which it was written towards acceptable and moral behaviour. The second school of thought does not view society as moral at all. They argue that maternal filicide in literature could be viewed as a form of fantasy fulfilment and that all people have an innate urge to "do away" with children (not only their own) as is evident in the wide scale societal neglect or even active injury inflicted on children. The third field uses maternal filicide as motif in order to educate and inform society of systemic abuses suffered by mostly marginalised and vulnerable people. This type of literature assumes that society is mostly moral but in serious need of information so as to mobilise them to seek solutions.

Four plays were selected for this research study which have maternal filicide as motif, namely: *Aalst* (McLean, 2007), My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies (Meiring, 2011), *And all the children cried* (Jones & Campbell, 2002) and *By the Bog of Cats* (Carr, 1999). As all four plays ask for psychological realism in performance, a brief review of acting approaches with specific emphasis on Konstantin Stanislavsky's System was undertaken. I stated that I subscribe to the acting approach as taught by Stanislavsky later in his life which is referred to as the psychophysical approach to acting. Practitioners and teachers of this approach believe characterisation to be greatly enhanced if an actor searches for the character's actions in a specific situation, rather than search for traits. This process is called action analysis and is done on the floor during rehearsals as opposed to around the table. What became evident through this review of acting approaches, though, was the fact that almost all theatre practitioners working with a text, believe proper text analysis to be vital for a full and complete

understanding of the text. Formalist text analysis was briefly discussed to give the reader an indication of how theatre practitioners analyse a text in order to get all the necessary information pertaining to a character as written by an author. It was stated that, for the purposes of this thesis, most information pertaining to character would be found in the background story, given circumstances and character components of formalist text analysis.

The four plays analysed in this thesis all have maternal filicide as motif and as such a review of this crime was undertaken. The three most dominant perspectives on maternal filicide were briefly discussed in an attempt to understand what type of mother would kill her child. Literature from the psychiatric perspective documented unipolar depression, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia as three conditions often associated with filicidal mothers. From the psychological literature, it emerged that borderline personality disorder, narcissistic personality disorder and antisocial personality disorder are often diagnosed in mothers who have killed their children.

The psychosocial perspective argues that a mother becomes filicidal because of environmental factors which impact negatively on her psychologically and thus impair her functioning. Environmental factors often associated with this crime are childhood trauma experienced by the mother, poverty, limited education, social isolation or marginalisation, previous criminality, a current abusive relationship and substance abuse. Research found that many mothers who killed their children have repeatedly sought help prior to the filicidal act. Of these factors, childhood trauma seem to be substantially indicative of mental illness in later life. The trauma a child experiences could be sexual, physical or emotional abuse, neglect or even only the absence of a primary caregiver.

Also from the perspective of psychology, child development theories were briefly looked at with specific reference to attachment theory. This theory posits that an insecure attachment style develops when a child fails to securely attach to his primary caregiver (usually the mother) during the first few years of his/her life and that this attachment style has been linked with behavioural problems, such as aggression, in adulthood. The formation of personality disorders, specifically, has been linked to childhood trauma. From the neurobiology perspective it was found that childhood trauma changes the structure of the brain which impairs regulation of emotions and could even impact on the formation and retrieval of memories.

Feminist writers researching maternal filicide, found these mothers to be struggling in a patriarchal society which socialises women as subservient second class citizens responsible for the running of the household. When a mother’s experiences contrasts with the romanticised and idealised discourses regarding motherhood, she interprets this as meaning that something is wrong with her. This

perspective argues that the negation of women's distress as merely pathological, is a contributing factor to maternal filicide in that powerless, repressed women exert power over their children, possibly fatally.

To make the psychiatric, psychological and psychosocial factors associated with maternal filicide recognisable when encountered in a text, I attempted to operationalize them. The different mental illnesses and personality disorders were delineated as affective, cognitive and behavioural manifestations or symptomology. The psychosocial factors were described in more concrete terms to establish how these might present in a dramatic text. These markers were searched for in the analysis of the four selected texts.

The first text was *Aalst* (2005) by Pol Heyvaert and Dimitri Verhulst from Belgium. I used the English translation (2007) by Duncan McLean for my analysis. The play is set in a courtroom where an invisible voice interrogates the parents in an attempt to understand their heinous actions. Sixty percent of this play reportedly consists of court transcripts of the actual trial, in Belgium, of Luc de Winne and Maggie Strobbe who killed their two children in 1999 in Aalst. As such this play is fact-based theatre of the tribunal variety. On analysis, I found the character of Cathy Delaney, the filicidal mother, to be consistent with research on maternal filicide if I accept my own assertion that she suffered from antisocial personality disorder of the secondary variable. The Voice in the play mentions that the psychiatrist found the parents to exhibit sociopathic behaviour and although the terms sociopath and psychopath are infrequently used in clinical circles, this does point to antisocial behaviour associated with antisocial personality disorder. Although De Winne's and Strobbe's sentences to lifelong imprisonment did in no way impact on my analysis of the play, it would correlate with research which found that most filicidal parents diagnosed with antisocial personality disorder, were found guilty of murder or manslaughter and incarcerated in prisons for violent offenders for maximum sentences. This in contrast with filicidal parents diagnosed with clinical conditions where mitigating circumstances often lead to shorter sentences in psychiatric facilities.

With regard to psychosocial factors, *Aalst* (McLean, 2007) adheres to research in that Cathy suffered severe childhood trauma, is a substance abuser, lives an isolated life, is being abused by her current partner and has a low level of education.

The second play that was analysed, was My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies (2011), an unpublished play by Lizz Meiring. The play is based on the true story of Ellen Pakkies who killed her tik-addicted son whilst living in drug-infested Lavender Hill. Pakkies was found guilty of murder but only sentenced to 280 hours community service. I found much evidence in the text that the Ellen character

possibly suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder. Even though the literature review of maternal filicide suggests that post-traumatic stress disorder is not closely associated with this crime, I argue that the answer to this deviation might be found in the geographic origins of the reviewed research. The literature reviewed mostly originated in America and Canada where socio-economic circumstances differ greatly from that in South Africa, and more specifically form that on the Cape Flats. Although my contention that Ellen might be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder does not correlate with research on maternal filicide, it does correlate with research on a life led with constant marginalisation, economic hardship and violence, all of which can be found in the text. Psychosocial factors present in My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies include severe childhood trauma, current chronic trauma, marginalisation, financial strain and numerous attempts at getting help from societal institutions. That another mother in South Africa (living in similar circumstances to which Ellen had lived) killed her addict son in August of this year (2016), might attest to the fact that the research on maternal filicide as it pertains to a specific South African situation, might differ from research elsewhere. There seems, however, to be a dearth in research on maternal filicide as a crime happening more frequently within a specific South African context. Be that as it may, many South Africans, and I, understand the specific environment in which this mother killed her son and as such I found the written character of Ellen and the filicidal act to be completely congruent with her specific, researched situation.

The third text that was analysed, was *And all the children cried* (2002) written by Judith Jones and Beatrix Campbell. Of the four texts analysed, this text was particularly graphic and horrific in its presentation of childhood sexual and physical abuse. There could be no doubt as to the extent of Gail, the filicidal character's, childhood trauma. Other psychosocial factors that were present were previous criminality, low level of education, societal neglect and current abusive relationship. Most research indicates that this level of trauma would lead to mental illness. The problem with this text, though, is that I could not decipher which mental illness she possibly suffered from. Most clinicians attest to the fact that mental illnesses often present as comorbid with other conditions and as such it is not unusual to detect symptomology of more than one condition in a person experiencing discomfort and stress. I argue that this is not the case with Gail, though, and that she exhibits symptomology of a contradictory nature. I concluded that the authors might have been too intent on conveying a specific message and that the character of Gail served a function primarily as opposed to becoming a coherent filicidal mother.

The fourth text under scrutiny, was celebrated Irish playwright, Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* (1999). This is a rewriting of Euripides's tragedy, Medea, and is set in contemporary Ireland. Of the four texts analysed, this is the only one that made abundant use of comedy before concluding with a

filicide/suicide. This might be because the Irish are famous for not taking themselves too seriously or because Carr agrees with the dictum that people have a negative desire for children. Xavier, one of Carr's characters, does say that if children were cattle they would have been fed for three months and then slaughtered. This was, however, in no way relevant to my particular analysis of the play, since my aim was to determine if Hester, the filicidal character, adheres to proven psychiatric, psychological or psychosocial research on mothers who kill their children. As this is a rewriting of Medea, the expectation was that Hester killed her daughter as an act of revenge against her partner. Maternal filicide with spousal revenge as motive, has been established as rare, but actual. It is my belief, though, that Hester did not kill Josie as an act of revenge against Carthage, her partner who left her for another woman, but because she wanted to spare Josie the life she herself had led; a life of misery. This would then constitute a mercy killing where this definition refers to a mother killing her child to relieve the child of real or imagined suffering. Resnick's research of maternal filicide found altruism as a motive to be present in more than fifty present of the cases he reviewed. Hester commits suicide after having slit Josie's throat and this also correlates with research on mercy killing where suicide or attempted suicide often follows the murder.

In cases of mercy murders where the child does not suffer from a serious physical illness or impairment, an illness can often be found in the mother. This is indeed the case with Hester. I found many cognitive, affective and behavioural manifestations in *By the Bog of Cats* (Carr, 1999) consistent with borderline personality disorder (BPD). The fact that she experienced trauma as a child and that her mother possibly suffered from BPD as well, also correlates with research regarding this disorder. Psychosocial factors associated with maternal filicide that were found in this text included her low status in the community and her subsequent marginalisation, alcohol abuse and previous criminality. Research shows that BPD is indeed associated with maternal filicide and as such I am of the opinion that Carr succeeded in writing a filicidal character consistent with research on this crime.

9.2 Conclusion

This study had as its aim to investigate to which extent the various psychiatric, psychological and environmental factors associated with maternal filicide, are in fact present in dramatic texts where it is expected of the actor to create a psychologically coherent and believable character.

It is my opinion that three of the four plays analysed for the purposes of this study adhere to research on maternal filicide with regard to psychiatric, psychological and psychosocial factors associated with this crime. One of the three, My naam/my name is Ellen Pakkies (Meiring 2011) was written under the constraints associated with the South African Afrikaans festival circuit. Either Meiring's vast

amount of research into maternal filicide or specifically the case of Ellen Pakkies paid dividends, or Abie Pakkies really did write this text using Meiring as scribe. Sixty percent of *Aalst* (McLean, 2007) consists of the actual court transcripts of the original filicidal couple and as such Heyvaert and Verhulst merely had to pen the actual facts. The remaining fictional forty percent could have thrown the apple cart, but this was not the case and I speculate that the vast amount of media coverage and subsequent in-depth documentaries on the actual case, might have presented the writers with a very clear picture of who these people were and why they did what they did, enabling them to write Cathy Delaney as an empirically coherent character. *By the Bog of Cats* (Carr, 1999) is a rewriting of Medea and even though I concluded that Hester's filicide was altruistic in nature and not driven by revenge, the psychosocial factors associated with Medea's murdering of her children, are also present in *By the Bog of Cats* (Carr, 1999). It is my opinion that Carr, Meiring, and Heyvaert and Verhulst succeeded in writing murdering mothers consistent with research on this crime. An informed actor would thus be able to create a psychologically coherent and believable character. I feel that this is not the case with *And all the children cried* (Jones and Campbell, 2002) and even though the writers adhered to most research on maternal filicide, the character of Gail manifests symptomology of a conflicting nature.

9.3 Possible further research

Although Euripides's Medea was a mythical woman, real mothers have been and still are, killing their children and literature through the ages have felt compelled to tell their stories. The same can be said of children killing their mothers, the most famous of these being Orestes and Electra, a brother and sister who plotted their mother's murder with Orestes finally doing the deed. This Greek myth was also penned by Euripides.

As is the case with maternal filicide, matricide, although incomprehensible to most people, happens. A cursory search of online media reporting on cases of matricide, reveals this to be a crime that happens across ethnic and economic lines with a variety of factors posited as leading to the murders (sexual, physical and emotional abuse, coercion by an unrelated older person, financial gain, substance abuse, satanic beliefs and mental illness to name but a few). It seems that many children do not only kill their mothers, but the whole nuclear family. In South Africa, Don Steenkamp killed his mother, father and sister in 2012 (Sampson, 2014) and Henri van Breda is awaiting trial for the murder of both his parents, his brother and seriously injuring his sister in 2015 (Evans, 2016).

A cursory search of matricide in theatre revealed Winston V. Saunders's *You Can Lead a Horse to Water* (2005) from The Bahamas, *Matricide - the Musical* (1998) written by Kathleen Mary Fallon

from Australia, Hélène Pedneault's *Evidence to the Contrary* (1993) from Quebec and Irish Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman* (2003).

Further research could establish if the proven factors as determined by research on matricide, are present in dramatic texts so as to enable an actor to create a psychologically coherent and believable character.

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